Where Water Hits Home: Colonial Technologies of Violence on IBPOC Peoples and Nonhuman Nature in Canada

by

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Abstract

This research-creation questions and resists colonial technologies such as industrialization and urbanization that exploit environments and IBPOC peoples–Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour–as resources for colonial "progress." The research examines how nature and human relations intersect through three bodies of water in Canada: the Bedford Basin in Nova Scotia, Lake Ontario, and the Athabasca River in Alberta. The creation of the project uses different local sources (articles, reports, personal stories, creative writing, art) and various methods (erasure, redaction, cut-up, and layering) to engage in conversations on the prevalence of colonial violence in the three case studies. The section titled "Capture" uses Jennifer Wenzel's notion of the "improving eye" and explores how colonial technology can enclose a (wo)man's thinking of land and water as a standing reservoir for expropriating and exhausting under the guise of growth and improvement. The section titled "Rupture" is a poetic unveiling of how the "improving eye" disrupts nature by inflicting violence on Indigenous and minority groups. "Rupture," therefore, explores how research-creation can be a mode of resisting and undermining the "improving eye" of colonial technologies by bringing minority voices and decolonial conversations into the foreground for thinking with nature and communities affected by polluted waters/land/air. In "Rupture," the first set of poems describe the Bedford Basin. For roughly two centuries, raw sewage was discharged into the Basin, affecting the health and lifestyle of the Africville community during the 19th and 20th centuries in ways that continue to impact Black Nova Scotians today. The second set of poems discuss Hamilton Harbour's polluted water and its effects on the impoverished communities alongside the Harbour. The last set of poems address the Athabasca oil sands operations, examining the effects of its deadly toxins on groundwater and its impact on Cree, Chipewyan, and Métis territories downstream the River.

Preface

This research-creation received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board, under the project name "The effects of polluting industries on Indigenous peoples and minority groups in Canada," No. Pro00104786, on February 26, 2021.

During the completion of my MA thesis, I published sections from chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 of this thesis as "Where Water Hits Home: An Analysis and Artist's Poetic Intervention" in the *Humanities Graduate Students' Anthology* at the University of British Columbia. I am the sole author of "Where Water Hits Home," and Penney et al. edited the anthology, *Watch*. The citation for this publication is:

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Dedication

A ghazal for giving the land back

Go back to your country. And this country? It sticks like a spider web with your flesh and mine.
We unfold from an amorphous watery mass. I must give what is not forever mine.

You don't belong here. Shhhhhhh. The Salmon from the River hears the water's probing babble:
Where does your pee go? Reborn as clouds, carried by winds over waters—you become mine.

You are not like us. I place my warm brow on cooling rocks from the Creek with emerging trust.
You map matter; I rupture the arbitrary lines; the Creek speaks of relations with bodies of mine.

Where are you from? A whiff of decaying vegetation tells me of a nearby marsh cultivating life.
My home: a compass from the waters of past/present; nîpîy[1] walkers protect homes like mine.

This poem is dedicated to Josephine Mandamin, an environmental activist from Wikwemikong First Nation in Ontario. She founded Mother Earth Water Walk with a group of Anishinaabe women in 2003 to raise awareness about water pollution in Canada and the urgency to protect nîpîy. She circled the shores of all five Great Lakes, a total distance of more than 17,000 km.

[1] nîpîy—Cree for water.

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در آخر، می خواهم از شریک زندگی خود، محمدرضا، و خانواده ام برای حمایت و تشویق بی پایانشان تشکر کنم. من بدون صبر، درک و تشویق آن ها نمی توانستم پایان نامه خود را به پایان برسانم. من برای همیشه متشکرم

Finally, I want to thank my partner, Mohammad Reza, and my family for their endless support and love. I could not have finished my thesis without their patience, understanding, and encouragement. I am forever thankful.

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Chapter 1 - Artist Statement: On Decolonial Ecopoetics

I begin by acknowledging and giving thanks to the spirits and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, specifically Edmonton, Alberta, where my work and writing for "Where Water Hits Home" took place. I am located on Treaty 6 territory, a traditional gathering place for the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence my life as a settler, a woman of colour, an environmental activist, and a poet. I am also grateful and indebted to Indigenous Tkaronto, where I (re)learned how to think and speak with nature and face the ongoing settler-colonial divides that constitute my western consumerist lifestyle. I was born on Treaty 13, the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit; the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa; the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples; and home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. I am also born to parents who immigrated to Canada from Iran and started a family benefiting from stolen Indigenous lands—accepting my identity as a settler reorients my role as a contemporary actor in an ongoing colonial history of theft and violence on Indigenous peoples and lands. I begin to inhabit a position of active interdependence with the Indigenous modes of tending to an always-changing Earth.

Actively reorienting ourselves to human and nonhuman beings requires, to echo Zoe Todd, a return to things we have previously explored "with an ethos of growth, change, and doubt." This return to our previous and current behaviours, logic, and ethics is an active (and mindful) approach in assessing and reassessing how we relate to place and our homes. By assessing our relationships with our physical environments that include the trees, the four-legged animals, the birds, the fish, the insects, and our waterways, we can question how our engagement with land and water re-establishes Eurocentric perspectives of nature as a machine or a material

resource. An active reorientation to the world requires us to question how we demand and depend upon nature so that we can learn how to heal and coexist with our environments. What does it mean when we (both the colonizer and colonized) reposition ourselves to recognize our relationships with human and nonhuman beings as interdependent? For Potawatomi writer and ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer, to be interdependent and interconnected with nature is to view land and water as "a gift economy with a bundle of responsibilities" rather than as property (a right) to obtain for free, at no cost (28). Kimmerer explains that, according to Indigenous worldviews, a healthy landscape can sustain all human and nonhuman beings because all beings understand that "the life of one is dependent on the life of all" (338). Reorienting ourselves to the world by engaging with the already active forms of world-building and healing that exist in Indigenous knowledges and storytelling renews our relationships with nature to be of shared responsibility. We learn, for instance, why drinking clean water without contaminants and breathing unpolluted air depends on what we put in our waters and how we care for our trees.

Nlaka'pamux judge Ardith Walkem calls the interdependency of humans with each other and their natural environment a "kin-centric perspective" (314). A kin-centric notion of ecology is an understanding that our environments can only exist when humans view their relationships with the life surrounding them as kin, "and it calls upon humans to honour these relationships" (314). By honouring our relationship with nature and each other, we come to understand the limits and thresholds that we are continuously confronting or negotiating with to sustain and heal the environments we need for survival. As Walkem explains, Indigenous peoples understand that the natural world is related to them, that the animals, lands, and waters are relatives and not resources (314). Indigenous scholar Dorothy Christian similarly uses the phrase "All My

Relations" to encompass this interrelatedness: an Indigenous perspective that everything within Creation is sacred and interrelated (Chen et al. 238).

Kimmerer also teaches us that when we are in a relationship of gratitude and reciprocity with Earth, we can learn from nature's gifts (food, medicine, shelter) and stories on how "to flourish under the most stressful of conditions" (275). Thus, what differentiates an active renewing of our sense of orientation to other humans and species versus a passive reorientation is the ability to go beyond the simple recognition and acknowledgement of our physical environments and the current histories of appropriation that surround us (what we call our intellectual and physical "proprieties"). An active reposition enables us to question how our voices, writings, and actions/activism destabilize the structures and systems that limit our ability to coexist with human and nonhuman nature, allowing us to then flourish under the most stressful of conditions through our kin-centric perspective.

While writing and creating the found poems for "Where Water Hits Home," I asked myself how I am repositioning my orientation to the world and its species so that my work and activism foreground marginalized and Indigenous communities without assuming intimate knowledge of them or generalizing about their positions. My poetic/artistic creations foreground Indigenous and minority peoples' knowledges, histories, perspectives while also asking how I am decolonizing my position as a writer who is also foregrounding her own voice and position in relation to those I seek to think and reimagine my kin-centric relations with. This research-creation follows a decolonial ecopoetics by speaking from a position of limitation, mindfulness, and recognition (following Walkem, Kimmerer, and Christian) that all things can be interrelated, and by "staying with the trouble" of making kin on a wounded Earth (Haraway 2). As explained by Donna Haraway, making kin on a damaged Earth "will be more

difficult than . . . set[ting] conditions for recognition of kinship," therefore, it "requires inheriting hard histories, for everybody, but not equally and not in the same ways" (89). Thus, making kin is not rooted in acts of reconciliation. Engaging in acts of kinship (to honour our relationship with nature and each other) for Haraway means to stay with the trouble of its "complex histories that are as full of dying as living, as full of endings, even genocides, as beginnings" (10). Hence, by adopting a heterogeneous approach to kinship—from Indigenous peoples' perceptions of kinship as interdependency and Haraway's (a settler's) perspective of kinship as "staying with the trouble"—I foreground IBPOC voices, not in ways that transfer Indigenous knowledge so much as center IBPOC experience, activism, and kinships (through acts of negotiation or resistance) to damaged place/home.

A decolonial ecopoetics is intertwined with a kin-centric notion of ecology; it is a resistance to Western devaluation and destruction of nature—a creation (a poem, story, painting) that is more political, or at least demands activism—through recognizing the rights and unique world experiences of all species and beings. The "eco" in ecopoetics comes from the Greek word oikos, meaning family, property, and house, and "poetics" comes from poiesis, meaning to make (Hume and Rahimtoola 1). Ecopoetics then questions how we might dwell on Earth, the politics of "homemaking," and how human and nonhuman communities come into ecological dialogue (1). If ecopoetics is the process of "making" ecologically oriented connections with humans and nature, decolonial ecopoetics orients the ecopoet to move beyond the bounds of settler logics of space and time (that land equals property and time means resource accumulation) by accepting place as a messy, incoherent, open, and temporary dwelling. What we call place/home is an amorphous mass of aqueous materiality (Chen et al. 71). Within this shapeless and incoherent place of homemaking, we are meeting up and overlapping with other beings and their unique

thresholds and tensions. Decolonial ecopoetics requires that we first recognize the conflicts, negotiations, and unpredictable encounters that arise from our coexistence with human and nonhuman beings (286). It compels the ecopoet to engage in moments of feeling out-of-place to renew her sense of orientation and to discover other ways to relate to a place that escapes habitual assumptions of homemaking (290). In this thesis, I draw on poetry's concern with the construction of the self and other to expose the "the Other" as fiction that limits the possibilities for interdependency and yet also highlights the complexity of our inherent differences to reimagine new forms of relations and kinships.

Iranian-Canadian artist Mitra Fakhrashrafi explains that in music, poems, text, and textile, water symbolizes "a place of creation, life, and sanctuary[/community]" (22). Sanctuaries/communities are made through the movements and organizing of human and nonhuman beings who refuse to affirm state boundaries and instead move toward a "radical embrace for protection" of all living beings (22). We can also explore bodies of water as guides that undermine the colonial approaches to mapping, which determine what is and is not out of place. Thus, I engage with a very literal tracking of water (specifically the Bedford Basin in Nova Scotia, Lake Ontario, and the Athabasca River in Alberta) to bring an understanding of how each of us is connected and how, like water, our relations can be "a source of threat and source of possibility" (5). Water is as much a character as the individual beings whose stories propel the poems/writings in this thesis. Water as materiality and as metaphor enables my ecopoetic and ecocritical thoughts and writings to support and enhance the voices of the people who come from communities resisting environmental racism; they are narrating and doing the activism themselves as my creative techniques create a visual of and an engagement with a decolonial ecopoetics.

The research of my project (described here but also woven throughout the following sections of the thesis) examines how nature and human relations intersect through three bodies of water in Canada (three contact zones): Bedford Basin, Hamilton Harbour, and the Athabasca River. My creative representations of this research (in the "Capture" and "Rupture" sections) is a collection of found poems. Found poetry is a creative and analytical process of using different ("found") sources (such as statistical data, reports, and written accounts from Indigenous peoples and other minority groups) and various methods (like erasure, cut-up, and layering) to create productive ways of analyzing, critiquing, and viewing the world. In "Where Water Hits Home," I make deliberate gaps (erasures), textures (blackouts), and overlaps (layering) of varied information to emphasize the thickness of the arbitrary and imaginative line that in maps and settler logic borders/colonizes our human and nonhuman relations. Thus, my creative techniques accent the thresholds—the tensions of our differences—of our watery places and human/nonhuman relations to connect to our vulnerable selves and the differences we inherit; to seek the threads that connect our coexistence, we must first confront our differences. Through my found practices, I actively reorient myself to human and nonhuman beings, not with a sense of comfort and certainty toward a place, but, similar to the movements of water, with the energy of adapting and changing toward the possibility of forming heterogeneous relations that forge paths for coexistence. By rupturing, erasing, redacting, and layering the found sources, I create an ethos of confusion, apprehension, unease, and responsibility to question the settler logic that determines who is visible/invisible and who is in place/out of place.

For my found poems on colonial texts (such as Bruce Gilley's article examined in the "Capture" section), I appropriate and co-opt the colonial practices of capture and misuse, erasing and redacting words in the texts in order to undermine the colonial matrix of power that exerts

itself on subjectivity, race, gender, economy, and nature. My poems reintroduce interventions into the current modes of ecological and social inequalities rather than invoke hostility. Similar to Jordan Abel in *The Place of Scraps*, I use an erasure technique to critique colonial texts. I create an in-between space in my poems—something in between text and poetry/story—a place to meet (and also perplex/destabilize) the reader. In *The Place of Scraps*, Abel's erasure poems respond to Marius Barbeau's ethnographic work, *Totem Poles*. Abel appropriates Barbeau's method of cutting and dislocating Indigenous totem poles and distorting Indigenous knowledges by cutting and erasing Barbeau's words. His erasure technique breaks textual fixity by overlapping fragments of words, creating clouds of alphabets, erasing everything but brackets, commas, and periods. Through the erasure technique, words linger in the empty spaces and each letter, word, and punctuation opens up space for the new words/letters to be heard and echo through (like an oral reading) to reach the reader. My erasure technique questions the colonial work by opening up space for the particularities of words and sentences to confront each other and accent the arbitrariness of colonial practices such as mapping and framing people and nature into categories of success, political and economic gains, and progress.

The erasure and redaction techniques create an anxiousness by juxtaposing colonial words and my poetic responses. I erase and redact sentences to create space for my poetry to find/confront the reader. Rita Wong's poetry inspired this anxious technique. In *forage*, Rita Wong also juxtaposes data, facts, fairy tales, and poetry to create an anxious encounter between the found words and the reader. Her poetic techniques create an apprehensive environment that demands that the reader rethink what they know about genetic modification and toxic e-waste exposure, how it should/should not look, and how it targets bodies. By provoking the feeling of apprehension, Wong conditions the possibility for new modes of perceiving and encountering

resource extraction and provides opportunities to turn our anxiety and apprehension into a "resistance from within … [to a life that] refuses to be anything but life" (22). Similarly, my poetic responses undermine what it means to be visible and in place and create possibilities for resistance/activism.

My poetic responses are juxtaposed with imperial and colonial language, suggesting that the appropriate model of an encounter between the two is one of resistance; these two discourses appear in direct opposition. However, through the poetic process of interruption and resistance (decomposing/fragmenting the colonial text/writing), the poet and the colonial text can engage in a relationship of translation, transformation, and transmigration (Sharpe 30) of knowledge, ideas, land and water. Thus, confronting different knowledges and ideas can translate, transform, and transmigrate how we see and read a text, "to reckon with the fact that the archive, too, is invention" (51). Hence, staying with colonial texts/writings through my poetic techniques, instead of retracting from them completely, can offer the possibility of moving across the linear bounds of space and time to redefine our understating of the works/archives that dictate how we "read" other beings.

My poetic practices like erasure, redaction, rupture (breaking sentences/ paragraphs apart) and layering (different words/works together) determine the conditions for coexistence through the particularities of the encounter between my poetry and the found sources. For instance, the found poems on Bruce Gilley's controversial argument to resurrect colonialism discharge the notion of an opportunity for the particularities of Gilley's and the poet's differences to forge paths for coexistence when only one of us reorients herself to the world and its beings through a kin-centric perspective. For Gilley, a person/being is visible and in place when they conform to colonial/capitalist practices of exploitation; thus, a person like myself (a racialized

body) can only be in dialogue with beings and practices that seek to exploit "the Other" through acts of resistance. Through my creative techniques, I stay with the trouble of Gilley's article to engage in acts of kinship, which, in this context, is the act of resisting practices of capture and power over life. I (re)distribute feelings such as apprehension, confusion, and discomfort to provoke the reader to acknowledge, question, and destabilize/undermine colonial and imperial violences on and within bodies/beings. I also ask myself how I can have a meaningful discussion with the reader (you: both the colonizer and the colonized) to flourish together under the most stressful conditions. As told by Billy-Ray Belcourt, "[a] struggling thing isn't a struggling thing/ if everything else is in a state of rot" (55). Like how Wong works with negative affects in *forage*, by erasing/redacting colonial texts to open space for my poetic responses, I create an anxious awareness of resource extraction and exploitation through the opposition between colonial words and mine. This anxious encounter between the found poems and the reader is not meant to push the reader away from my poems. On the contrary, it expresses a desire to position the reader to question and analyze our current relations with "Other" humans and beings.

In "Where Water Hits Home," I also think about how conditions for coexistence with the communities I engage with in my found poetry (Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour) are possible without assuming intimate knowledge of them or generalizing about their positions. My goal is for my found poems (comprised of anecdotes from my interviews with IBPOC peoples, IBPOC creative works, and local reports/articles) to become another mode of retelling the stories and truths from the communities by erasing, redacting, and layering sources so these stories can narrate/annotate themselves. Working with an article like Stephen Leahy's (see page 62), for instance, required a re-understanding of what it means to act in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. In order to understand and consider the particularities of the encounter between Leahy's

article (written against resource extraction), my own poetic responses, and the effects of the oil sands on Indigenous communities of Alberta, I had to find the point of contact between us and the points of differentiation "while also recognizing the energies generated by their coexistence" (Chen et al. 286). Thus, by rupturing Leahy's article and writing from within this space, I confronted my position as a settler and writer and Leahy's position as both a settler and a writer; we both write from a place of anger toward the oil sands and yet we both cannot understand the reality of living with such pollution or watching the health of the River and its species declining over time.

To rupture is to break free from the structures and systems that assume how we exist or should exist in relation to capitalist colonial ideologies. My poetic responses within Leahy's ruptured article portray my position as a poet as limited and partial because while at times my words are in conversation with the article, other times I am in between white spaces, thus portraying the ongoing work I must do to unhinge/break free from my consumerist and extractive lifestyle. Rupturing is then a process of breaking assumptions and generalizations about IBPOC peoples through an active repositioning of how I read, write, and engage with their stories and knowledges. Ultimately, rupture as a poetic technique emphasizes moments where I, the poet, refuse to digest "the Other" into an ideal form or romanticize my own position to perfectly harmonize with nature, Indigenous, and minority knowledges. My poetic responses ask that we continue to rupture our positions with other beings so we do not assume mastery or complete knowledge over others.

I also approach the question of appropriation through the practice of annotation. My goal is for the reader to do the difficult work of confronting the polluted communities—the toxins in the waters, the dead animals emerging from the polluted waters and lands, and the toxic smokes

that would suffocate all the beings in the community—without making assumptions about their experiences. I (the poet) must prevent any opportunity for thinking for these communities. Thus, I appropriate the practice of annotation from a mode of white/colonial justification to a practice of kinship so that the communities can narrate their stories themselves and reimagine their community flourishing despite their polluted waters and lands. Thus, annotation as a poetic form works toward a kin-centric perspective of IBPOC peoples' struggles and works of resistance.

In her text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Christina Sharpe explains that the use of annotation on Black digital images of suffering is like an asterisk that provides "some sort of note or other metadata" to inspire democratic solidarity with Black bodies (181). However, often the images go unnoticed because the annotation solely "solidif[ies] and make[s] continuous the colonial project of violence" (181). Thus, the annotations on images of Black bodies suffering do not incite empathy because the "note" or "metadata" assert the colonial notion that Black bodies are a danger to others and themselves. For example, Sharpe explains that while she was searching through the digital archive for research, she came across a picture of a Haitian girl with the word "Ship" written on her forehead. The ten-year-old girl is one of many survivors of the Haiti earthquake in 2010, and the photo shows her lying down on the ground, staring right into the camera with the word "Ship" labelling her body. Underneath the picture, the caption reads: "Haiti struggles for aid and survival after the earthquake. © Joe Raedle" (81). The photo says nothing about who the girl is, where her parents are, what her scars portray, and why she has the word "Ship" on her forehead. Instead, the caption implies that the word "Ship" saves the girl; "Ship" is an opportunity for her to survive, but with the white man's living conditions. However, Sharpe also shows how Black wake work (works from Black people in the wake of legal chattel slavery) can appropriate annotative and redactive practices to undermine the state's racialized

surveillance and the unreliable/missing information that colonial injustices project on Black bodies.

Sharpe annotates the picture of the Haitian girl by "imagin[ing] [the] photographer pulling back the shot to reveal not one Black girl child but row after row after row of Black girls, boys, men, and women with the word Ship affixed to their foreheads" (53). She annotates the picture to portray the "wound over and under her right eye and a piece of paper stuck to her bottom lip" (44). Sharpe annotates each wound and item on the Black girl to symbolize colonial abuse and neglect.

As a non-Black poet, how can I annotate the archive that provides the articles and photos of Africville in Nova Scotia without replicating the grammar of appropriation, generalization, and reporting? I use found practices such as layering information and adding images so one can annotate the other to allow the poet and the reader to coexist together beyond the logic of the ledger and within the limits of reimagining Africville. In the poem "Bedford Basin," I layer descriptions of Africville from the *Africville Relocation Report* to then bring focus to a Black female resident of Africville talking about her experience growing up in the community. Her account, accompanied by Colleen Shelley Hamilton's comments from our interview, annotates the photographs of Africville on the next page (see page 42) to reveal how the community was/is surviving, rupturing, and existing under the conditions of environmental racism.

Ultimately, my research-creation requires that human beings reimagine and reorient themselves with the world and its human and nonhuman nature and form heterogeneous relations that forge paths for coexistence in the face of ecological/social inequalities. My decolonial ecopoetics is intimately related to being responsible for changing Earth by cultivating social and creative modes of resisting and challenging the violence of extracting and polluting technologies

on IBPOC peoples and nonhuman beings through IBPOC knowledges and their distinct ways of living with the nonhuman nature. Decolonial ecopoetics requires that we first embrace the tensions of our differences through a kin-centric perspective. This enables us to see both the beauty and ugliness of the world, which can be powerful and horrifying.

Chapter 2 - Introduction: The Aesthetic Logic of Extraction

In the essay "Afterword: Improvement and Overburden," Jennifer Wenzel argues that a "resource logic is also a resource aesthetic" when the aesthetic gaze inspires the logic behind resource extraction, appropriation and exploitation (Wenzel 6). For Wenzel, capitalist modernity begins with the "improving eye" of the European explorer that is "at once economic and aesthetic" (2). The Europeans were the first to gaze upon the "beckoning landscapes" of the Americas in a matter that envisioned the beautiful and the profitable as one and the same (2). As a result, their "improving eye" reduced already distinguished values and forms of life on Indigenous landscapes —where the animals, insects, plants, and waters were valued intrinsically, not as commodities, not for their "use value or exchange value, but as agent[s] in and of [themselves] both plural and singular"—to labels of newfound beauty in need of cultivation for capital, productivity, and technology (Chen et al. 237). The logic of extraction in mining practices, for example, uses the aesthetic and economic judgment of the "improving eye" to separate overburden. Wenzel explains that "[o]verburden is topsoil, sand, and clay; sedimentary rock; surface water and groundwater" that is lying on top and below minable resources like ore, coal and petroleum (6). Overburden is then "the perfectly good stuff that just happened to be in the way" of resource extraction or societal progress, and it is only through an aesthetic gaze that determines what is and is not valuable (or beautiful) that someone can look upon a landscape "and see it all as overburden" (7). Hence, in the name of "improving life for all"—"humans and nonhuman nature"—the aesthetic and economic judgment of the "improving eye" renders everything, except the cherished resource, unproductive waste (8).

Does capitalism and its extractive/polluting technologies consider not just landscapes but also people overburden? If so, why do neocolonial/settler countries like Canada continue to

specifically objectify IBPOC peoples—Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour—as overburden and exploit their bodies and communities alongside nonhuman nature within the unequal distribution of environmental health hazards? Steve Lerner makes the case in his book, *Sacrifice Zones*, that under neocolonial/settler rule, there is a large host of low-income and minority populations who live in environmental "sacrifice zones" adjacent to hot spots of chemical pollution (Lerner 3). Most sacrifice zones are predominantly inhabited by IBPOC peoples who "are required to make disproportionate health and economic sacrifices" that white privilege (starting from the privileges of the rich and corporate power) can avoid (3). The label "sacrifice zones" was coined by government officials to identify locations where the production of nuclear weapons during the Cold War had "caused a small number of citizens to make health and economic sacrifices on the altar of national security" (3). However, Lerner argues that the "sacrifice zones" designation must include the "pattern of unequal exposures [that] constitutes a form of environmental racism . . . being played out on a large scale across [North America]" (3). My short collection of found poems in this thesis, “Where Water Hits Home," therefore, is an ecocritical/ecopoetic rendering of how extractive and polluting technologies of violence in Canada focus on those "othered" communities (IBPOC peoples and nonhuman nature) as sacrifice zones for dumping toxic waste on/in their environments and extracting their lands and waters for resources.

"Where Water Hits Home" disrupts the dominant gaze of the "improving eye" of industries and corporations that view dirty environments as valuable and beautiful for their economic profit. We can find this strange and sublime aesthetic of extraction in Edward Burtynsky's contemporary industrial landscape photographs. According to environmentalist Jennifer Peeples, Burtynsky's photographs elicit a sense of the sublime (see Image 2.1). The

sublime differs from the beautiful because while we could find beauty in things that are small, "delicate, graceful and clean," the sublime is "a mental state caused by our inability to fathom the power, vastness, magnitude and magnificence of an object witnessed" (Peeples 379). Thus, Peeples explains how Burtynsky's photographs of mines, tailing ponds and industrial damage produce "tensions that arise from recognizing the toxicity of a place, object or situation, while simultaneously appreciating its mystery, magnificence and ability to inspire awe" (375). She calls this dissonant feeling of power and powerlessness, beauty and ugliness, the "toxic sublime" (375). For her, the toxic sublime is necessary when dealing with pollution, for it creates "sublime responses of self-evaluation, deliberation, and irrationality from these altered landscapes where these responses would not otherwise exist" (388). The "improving eye" of extractive/polluting industries (manufacturing plants and oil refineries) and state officials, however, ignores the tensions of the toxic sublime by clarifying and simplifying the sublime as a site of destruction to a place of "extraordinary human accomplishment" for providing valuable/beautiful resources (389). Thus, to recognize the tensions of the toxic sublime, we (human beings) must first question the "improving eye" of industries and governments by seeing the sublime against the exploitation of IBPOC peoples' bodies, land, and economy.

Image 2.1 Burtynsky, E. "Alberta Oil Sands #9" Photograph
(*Edward Burtynsky*, 2007, https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/oil.)

My research-creation, then, practices an ethics of care, of seeing and being present and conscious in the Anthropocene—an epoch of human impact and damage on Earth's geology and ecosystem—by not merely asking questions, but by "telling the stories-that-matter. It is in recognizing this . . . that a truly ethical research practice emerges" (Loveless 54). Through found poetry, I appropriate the aesthetic/extractive practices of the "improving eye" such as cutting up, redacting, layering, erasing, and drawing on materials to then "find" and engage in conversations for questioning and resisting nature and IBPOC peoples' orientation to the world as a never-ending, commodifiable resource.

Extractive and polluting industries profit from IBPOC peoples' lands and resources,

which comes at the expense of subjecting Indigenous peoples and minority groups to environmental racism. The communities I engage with and write about in "Where Water Hits Home" portray incidents of environmental racism. In Nova Scotia, the Halifax City forcefully displaced Black Nova Scotians in the 1940s to the last house demolished in 1969 to turn the Africville community into industrial land (Hamilton). Before and during the demolition of Africville property, raw sewage was discharged into the Basin for roughly two centuries (19th and 20th centuries) (Clairmont and McGill 12). The city also dumped garbage near the community; thus, the forced displacement exacerbated the communities' health and financial well-being (12). The Africville residents continue to suffer from the toxic legacy of environmental racism. In Ontario, Hamilton Harbour's steel industry continues to pollute the Harbour with toxic levels of phosphorus, ammonia, heavy metals, polychlorinated biphenyl, and coal tar, affecting the health and lifestyle of impoverished communities living near the Harbour (Coleman 118). In Alberta, ever since Suncor—one of the largest oil companies in Canada—started operating in 1967 (in Fort McMurray), bitumen-laced water from its Ponds have been seeping into the groundwater (including other toxins like PAHs, naphthenic acids, mercury, and arsenic) and flowing into the Athabasca River (Turner 426). The River carries the toxins downriver into Indigenous communities in Northern Alberta, such as Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay (426). Due to the high degree of toxicity leaking into the River, and surrounding peatlands, wetlands, and other surface waterbodies, there are surges in cancer cases, such as soft tissue cancer. "Soft tissue cancer is supposed to be one in 100,000, and we have had 3 or 4 here in a community of 12,000," a Fort McKay resident expressed to the Keepers of the Athabasca (an Indigenous-led organization to protect the Athabasca waters) in their "Interviews" (8). Nevertheless, the industries and corporations, along with the relaxed and

biased management of governments, continue to exacerbate IBPOC peoples' health, cultural integrity, and economic well-being (Tarbell and Arquette 99).

Through the failures of federal, provincial, and municipal governments, private and government-funded extractive/polluting industries and corporations continue to ignore IBPOC peoples' rights to life, health, safety, and culture in North America. In 2009, the Royal Society of Canada (RSC) published a comprehensive overview of the environmental and health impacts of the oil companies in Alberta (Turner 567). They concluded that there was 'no credible evidence of environmental contaminant exposures from oil sands developments reaching downstream communities at levels expected to cause elevated cancer cases'" (qtd. in Turner 567). This lack of evidence stems from the "sparse data" and major gaps on overall water quality found in environmental impact assessments from the oil industries (568). In general, industry and policymakers have failed to implement necessary regulatory assessments while refusing to listen to IBPOC peoples' concerns about the current/visible effects of water/land pollution in their communities, especially as the factories/industries expand in scale and continue to impact IBPOC peoples' health and traditional lifeways (569). Even today, during a global pandemic, Canadian governments have further reduced the "opportunities for meaningful participation in municipal governance" for the "many vulnerable communities that have been among the hardest-hit by COVID-19" (Smit et al. 13). In September 2020, the Windsor Law Centre for Cities released a report on how the vast majority of Canadian municipalities have been "even less responsive than usual to the needs of vulnerable communities, at a time when their vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the pandemic" (15). The pandemic is therefore not "the great equalizer"—a disease that transcends wealth, fame, prestige, or age—touted by governments and the mainstream media, for it continues to affect

those who are socially disadvantaged, "from health, economic, and social perspectives" (13). Similarly, Canada needs to work toward political action and a shift in policymaking to dismantle current structures that unequally distribute ecological harm to IBPOC communities.

IBPOC works (their knowledges, narratives, and art) and mobilities (gestures/actions, activism, and liberation) serve as evidence of the immanent-active labour of being and resisting in the wake of colonialism; their distinct narratives of struggle and resistance can alter the dominant colonial, white supremacist, and capitalist perceptions of environmental devastation, political impotence and inaction. The sacrifice zones, in particular, are places of "critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, [and] vernacular expression" (Pratt 37). Mary Louise Pratt has termed as "contact zones" where languages, cultures, and histories come together to "meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (34). From these contact zones, IBPOC peoples' distinct narratives and histories portray the already active forms of world-building and healing that are integral to creative and adaptive modes of surviving an always-changing Earth.

In contrast to the capitalist colonial ideologies that represent IBPOC peoples and the land they live on as overburden—as objects to be removed from their natural locations (healthy places) and relocated to other surfaces (contaminated by pollutants such as bitumen and metals)—IBPOC peoples function as multiple collectivities and heterogeneities with varying capacities and potentials for transformation, creativity, and resistance. They exist and survive in the past, present, and future Anthropocene through their resistance against being physically and psychologically expelled from interacting with all bodies and ecologies. Human and nonhuman interrelatedness and coexistence (like ideas of kinship) necessitates human beings to engage

with the seen and unseen worlds (the entirety of the physical environment) through multiple subjectivities and points of view, with "the intellectual/mind, the physical/body, the emotional/heart, and the spirit" (Chen et al. 238). Thus, to exist and survive in the Anthropocene demands that we (human beings) reimagine and reorient ourselves with the world and its human and nonhuman nature and form heterogeneous relations that forge paths for coexistence in the face of global calamities. In keeping with this reimagining, Donna Haraway suggests that we refrain from calling our current epoch the Anthropocene, which embraces "autopoiesis" (or self-making) and all other "self-sustaining system fantasies" (Haraway 125) and instead conceptualizes it as the "Chthulucene" which is "a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying [together] in response-ability on a damaged Earth" (2).

Conceptualizing the current epoch as the Chthulucene requires sympoesis, an ongoingness of "becoming-with" the world, to engender dynamic forms of living together (world-making) on a damaged Earth (Haraway 125). Kathrin Thiele, consequently, argues for "a belief in this world" that transforms any transcendental belief in an escape from the "bloody here and now" into an acceptance of the conditions of the world as it exists in the present (Thiele 35). The "active affirmation of 'what is'" enables a resistance that is immanent to life, thereby inaugurating a dynamic process for creating something new and for an "intervention into this world" (37). This research-creation, therefore, follows a decolonial ecopoetics through sympoesis: a becoming-with the "experiences of unease, discomfort, and illness to pursue vital, though difficult, forms of [human and nonhuman] mutuality and association" (Hume and Rahimtoola 6). Through an ecocritical lens, this work "encourages us to expand our repertoire of affects to incorporate disappointment, sadness, sickness, failure, and other negative feelings"

so that interventions into the current modes of ecological and social inequalities can take place (6). From this expansion of affects, "Where Water Hits Home" urges us (both poet and reader) "to cobble together the 'arts of living on a damaged planet'" by becoming "children of compost" (Haraway 136). Haraway explains that "children of compost" understand how to "inherit the layers upon layers of living and dying that infuse every place," including the places we call our homes (138). Through the (inter-textual) relations created between texts, images, and creative works, my thesis will show how to recompose our response-ability to Earth by reimagining ourselves as "children of compost."

Chapter 3 - Capture: The "Improving Eye" and its Colonial Practices of Capture and Misuse

In this section, the found poems explore the notion of the "improving eye" by engaging with Bruce Gilley's very controversial article, "The Case for Colonialism." In his recent article (2017), Gilley, a political science professor at Portland State University, argues for a return of colonialism by discussing the beneficial impact colonial power has had on developing countries via economic profit, technological advancement, and social development (Gilley 2). Essentially, the article argues for a new colonialism that is beneficial and legitimate because it is chosen by "the colonized," thus attractive to Western liberals, and is "low-risk and self-financing," which is attractive to conservatives (11). In the poem titled "The C Word" (see Poem 3.1), I chop up, rearrange, and erase Gilley's words to reveal the inherent contradiction in his request. Gilley calls on countries with a history of colonialism to continue labelling their country colonial rather than "use an ever-expanding set of euphemisms that avoid the 'C' word" (8). The contradiction the poem unearths is why Gilley is "right" for marking settler countries colonial when white narratives erase and neutralize decades of colonial power and genocide. Gilley is "right" not because we must "embrace the historical record of colonialism" (8), but rather because we must acknowledge the history of colonialism to resist and subvert settler-colonial countries like America and Canada. These countries minimize the severity and structural implication of colonialism via historical amnesia. Hence, the poem undoes the paradox in Gilley's request to not circumvent the "'C' word" by bringing the "'C' word" to the foreground so that the history of colonialism and its ongoing practices and ideologies are not lost to the "improving eye" of the colonizer/capitalist.

The C Word

msilainolo msilainolo. msilainolo. msilainolo olonialism olonialism olonialism. olonialism

s **Rather than speak in euphemism about 'shared sovereignty' or 'neo-trusteeship',** s
i **such actions should be called 'colonialism' because it would embrace rather than evade the** i
l historical record l
a a
i in state of amn- i
n esia, melting n
o pot o
l negates l
o colonial o
foundation
colonial
still is
colonial

Rather than use an ever-expanding set of euphemisms to avoid the 'C' word
-'shared sovereignty', 'conservatorship', 'proxy governance', 'transitional administration', 'neo-trusteeship', 'cooperative intervention'- these arrangements should be called 'colonialism' because it would embrace rather than evade the historical record

Poem 3.1 "The C Word"

In Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature*, he coins the term "dark ecology" to refer to "a perverse, melancholy ethics that refuses to digest the object [the other] into an ideal form [or product]" (Morton 667). Hence, dark ecology is the belief that there are no transcendental positions to take in our current ecological crises. There is no approach to obtain a "better" ecology/world beyond the here and now. It is ultimately a position of what Morton defines as a "radical commitment" to the world as we embody it and as we acknowledge and "stay with it" "in all its meaninglessness" (631). There are no critical choices to be made in this world when these choices position (wo)man to care for the world without being responsible for it. Hence, they are choices that fall back into consumerism and extractive ideology (691). To be without nature is then to find yourself on the side of "no choice at all" but to confront the world as is, without a romanticized notion of what it could be/become with/without certain humans and natures. Thus, by adopting Morton's dark ecology, I find the essence of the "improving eye" in

(wo)man's particular orientation to the world, their distinct interactions with the world and its otherness.

Not all (wo)men look with the "improving eye;" however, how we choose to orient ourselves to human and nonhuman beings is deeply rooted in the ongoing settler-colonial divides that constitute our western consumerist lifestyles. The "improving eye" positions us to feel at home and conform to habitual assumptions of homemaking by accepting place as stable; nature as unlimited/"Other;" and our relations to be neutral and free of violence. Hence, we might not look at a place and see everything as an overburden (certain human/nonhuman beings as valuable or not valuable), but the "improving eye" works to remove us from our relations, haunting our choices, and wanting us to ignore colonialism's/capitalism's assertive role in establishing and determining our relationships. By staying with the conflicts, negotiations, and unpredictable encounters that constitute our dark ecology, we can renew our sense of orientation and discover other ways to relate to place that destabilizes the structures and systems of the "improving eye;" to pay close attention to the possibility of human and nonhuman relations within the limitations of our dark ecology.

Gilley's "improving eye," for instance, orients him to frame the world in colonial categories of productivity and advancement. Hence, my poem "The C Word" portrays Gilley's position as a white colonial man in power via his bold horizontal writing, whereas my decolonial response is in a vertical position, shown in gray writing. In this manner, can the colonizer (re)orient his thinking, his "improving eye" (portrayed in horizontal writing), to consider the position/side of "no choice at all;" can he face a world with no choice but to tend all forms of human and nonhuman suffering? I also question if we (students, activists, teachers, parents, and bystanders) can (re)orient ourselves to embrace the dark ecology (the tensions of

the toxic sublime) of our time. Embracing a dark ecology requires seeing both the beauty and ugliness of the world, which can be powerful and horrifying. However, this tension is necessary to question the "improving eye" (the horizontal writing) as a fundamental call for racial, social, and environmental neglect, oppression and abuse.

The aesthetic practices of the "improving eye," within categories of colonial/capitalist understanding, reveal specific people and natures as standing-reserve. However, the "improving eye" is not merely a framework that plans what becomes overburden; instead, it is essentially a calling-forth. Accordingly, my second poem titled "The Case" (see Poem 3.2) looks like a briefcase to depict the "improving eye" as both a framework and a call for colonial demands. My poem portrays Gilley's words as both a framing of human and nonhuman nature as a standing-reserve and a calling-forth for colonial power. For example, Gilley claims that millions of people voluntarily moved closer to more intensive colonial rule during European colonialism (Gilley 4). As Gilley is calling-forth (making his case for) colonization, I interrupt him by appropriating colonial practices of erasure, disruption, and destruction. My poem, then, responds by erasing and redacting through my blacking-out of most of Gilley's words to display the inherent lie in Gilley's case. In my own words (written in gray), the poem portrays that most colonized people were forced to move closer to colonial rule to pay taxes. Black people in Africa, for example, were forced to live near colonial bases to pay the gross colonial taxes placed on their native land and resources (Roo 16). Thus, my poem appropriates the colonial practices of erasure, disruption, and destruction to intervene, complicate, and break Gilley's calling-forth of human and nonhuman nature into labour and product.

I accentuate Gilley's "Case for Colonialism" by enabling his words to echo and haunt my poetic responses in grey to then invoke an anxious and curious encounter between their two

different and yet uniting hauntings: Gilley's words haunt the poet's words, then the poet haunts the reader into existence and resistance toward the systems of exploitation that Gilley (literally and figuratively) demands. Erasing and blacking out (redacting) sentences in Gilley's article then work toward seeing and reading something in excess of what is caught in the frame. Toward seeing something beyond the visuality that is as Billy-Ray Belcourt argues in *NDN Coping Mechanisms* subtended by the logics of coloniality. By also redacting a couple of sentences in the poem ("The Case"), I recreate the colonial borders/lines that organize people and beings based on their racial/social differences. Both before and after the redacted lines, Gilley and I encounter reoccurring experiences: for Gilley, it is the experience of power and greed, and for me, it is the experience of rewriting the struggles of racialized bodies surviving colonialism's haunting manifested through Gilley. The redaction portrays time and place remaining constant for Gilley, while for the poet, it collapses back to past, present, and future struggles for a transformative politics of existing and resisting, even if momentarily, colonialism's/capitalism's practices of capture and power over life.

The Case

Colonialism can be recovered by weak and fragile states when progress is the colonial ruler drawing white integers on white
today in three ways: by reclaiming colonial modes of governance; by bouncing tongues off the walls of occupation to utter white lies
by recolonising some areas; and by creating new Western colonies breeds layers of flaky soil, abuses the umbilical cord to suffocate
from scratch. [redacted]
[redacted] **significant social, economic and** historic knowledge of a place no knowledge about
political gains under colonialism: expanded education, improved public health, the abolition of active slavery to sensible slavery
of slavery, widened employment opportunities, improved administration, the creation of colonialism to neocolonial to settler society
basic infrastructure, female rights, enfranchisement of untouchable or historically excluded land from Eurocentric power
communities, fair taxation, access to capital, the generation of historical and cultural knowl-edges folded thin like a knife on throat
edge, and national identify formation, to mention just a few dimensions. [redacted]
[redacted] **Millions of people moved closer to areas of** jobs to pay colonial taxes for their own native land
more intensive colonial rule, sent their children to colonial schools and hospitals, went to institutional spaces to learn colonial laws
beyond the call of duty in positions in colonial governments, reported crimes to colonial technology in power over land, over dignity
police, migrated from non-colonised to colonised areas, fought for colonial armies and par- divides into heaven, hell, and savages
ticipated in colonial political processes – all relatively voluntary acts played on stage better than giving up the floor completely

Poem 3.2 "The Case"

My poem titled "The Boy Who Cried Oppression" (see Poem 3.3) reveals the "improving eye" as an aesthetic gaze that sees beauty (success) in the accumulation of items/services. For example, Gilley states that through "'colonialism for hire'" colonization can occur again by paying colonial states "for their services, [which is] an important motivator to be successful" (Gilley 10). Therefore, Gilley demands that the world stops its "cries of oppression" so that countries, the colonizer and the colonized, can start benefiting financially (11). My poem responds sarcastically by alluding to the fable "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." My poem opens up (and ruptures) Gilley's words to reveal each word/sentence/phrase as a cry for oppression that, like the wolf in the story, who is at first not real, materializes after the reader stops trusting Gilley's case for colonialism. Gilley's case for colonialism renders "the Other" as overburden by manifesting/conjuring the wolf (exploitive industries and technologies) through his colonial/capitalist cries for progress. Thus, the "improving eye" is the settler-colonial mentality and Eurocentric perspectives ("the Boy") that set the environment for the wolf to materialize with oppressive power.

The Boy Who Cried Oppression

how to motivate Western countries to become colonial. Despite cries of 'exploitation', colo- nialism was probably a money loser for imperial powers. The Stanford economist Richard Hammond coined the term 'uneconomic imperialism' to describe the ways that European powers embarked on ruinously costly and ultimately money-losing colonialism for largely non-economic reasons. That is why they gave up their colonies so easily. Give it up boy! Possessions you've gained: milk, honey, whole wheat bread, a dozen eggs, 1 tomato, 7 silver coins, 2 pairs of shoes, a roof, a door, 3 windows, cement, cup of sugar, pinch of sea salt. The list goes on, but space is limited. You wait patiently. When hope is replaced with a cry of oppression you call for a

'colonialism for hire'.

Colonial states would be paid for their services, an important motivator to be successful.

So here is

a modest idea: build new Western colonies from scratch.

Colonialism could be resurrected without the usual cries of oppression, occupation, and exploitation.

A preposterous idea? Perhaps. But not so preposterous as the anti-colonial ideology that for the past 100 years has been haunting the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the Third World. A hundred years of disaster is enough. It is time to make the case for colonialism again. The boy cried oppression. The villagers came with swords and spears. The boy exclaimed, "it was a joke." But the villagers attacked anyhow, no hesitation, no mercy. The cry of oppression is not the wolf; it is the foundation of the wolf.

Poem 3.3 "The Boy Who Cried Oppression"

Chapter 4 - Rupture: Resisting and Challenging the "Improving Eye"

4.1 Bedford Basin

Africville developed on the southern shore of Bedford Basin in Nova Scotia, Canada. In my interview with Afro-Metis singer/songwriter, C. Shelley Hamilton describes Africville from her lineage in Africville, Nova Scotia, as a community of "[B]lack slaves [who] settled in Canada when they escaped from the south in the 1820s & 1850s during the Underground Railroad." Thus, Black settlers sought refuge along the banks of the Bedford Basin from enslavement and anti-Black racism in Halifax: "The [B]asin's waters gave my ancestors opportunities to fish and farm and the Baptist Church untied the community. People gathered to sing, celebrate, and be baptized in the [B]asin's waters." Hamilton also explains that environmental racism was central to the experience of the Africville community. "Although the area was in the city," Hamilton says, "money was never allowed for water development because of race. People never had water or sewage development. The community was situated next to the city dump." For roughly two centuries (19th and 20th centuries), raw sewage was discharged into the Basin, and the city dumped garbage (human and animal feces, infectious, hazardous, and radioactive wastes) near the Africville community (Clairmont and McGill 12). Therefore, Africville residents had to live with polluted waters and land. Then in 1947 the Halifax City approved plans to turn Africville into industrial land and promised its residents "urban renewal," resulting in the forceful displacement of Africville residents and the expropriation and bulldozing of their homes with the last property demolished in 1969: "My people were kicked out of Africville for 'land development' . . . that never happened" (Hamilton). As of today, Hamilton explains, "there still has never been any 'urban development' on the land . . . and without any support financially or otherwise, the community became more impoverished living in a city that

didn't accept them." Thus, displaced residents of Africville and their children continue to suffer from the toxic legacy of environmental racism.

My poems "Dump Fire in Africville" (see Poem 4.1) and "Bedford Basin: excerpts from and beyond the *Africville Relocation Report*" (see Poem 4.2) expose the effects of the "improving eye" of the Nova Scotian Government on Black Canadians living in Africville. The poem "Dump Fire in Africville" is written as a Shakespearean sonnet to compare the sonnet's fixed and calculated structure to the limited mindset and "improving eye" of the government of Nova Scotia when exploiting the Black community of Africville. Although, the poem subverts the Shakespearean form of addressing a problem in the first three quatrains and a solution in the last two lines. It does so by portraying an ideal white middle-class lifestyle in the first three quatrains of the poem and then addressing the polluted waters and waste plant at the end of the poem. Hence, my poem does not end with a "solution" or resolution for Black Nova Scotians post-Africville. Instead, the poem "extracts" a description of Africville (placed adjacent to the last two lines of the poem) from a former resident, named Eddie Carvery, as a glimpse into the life of a Black person surviving in Africville: "There would be walls of fire and toxic smoke, and we used to run through that fire to get the metals before they melted because we scavenged off the dump. We had to. You had to do that to survive" (qtd. in Tavlin). The purpose of Carvery's quote is to portray the toxic procedures of the "improving eye" that calls forth Black bodies into labour (how they survive with their contaminated environments) and product (as overburden displaced through acts of contamination). The quote, therefore, annotates my Shakespearean sonnet to portray how the "improving eye" operates as a mechanism of erasure of places and beings labelled as "the other" to white supremacy/colonial progress. Through the use of the quote, I interpret the waste supply (open-pit dump), the polluted water, and the heat, all

mentioned in the sonnet, not as characteristics of Africville but as the violent condition of living in Africville due to environmental racism.

Dump Fire in Africville

Beside your house the flowers rise and breathe;
birds gulp the crisp air like worms flying by.
You love this earthy smell nearby, beneath
the baby apple trees, oh, lovely pie!

You love the water's taste of sweet bourbon,
reminds you of your wedding night at home
drunk in the garden, and yet determined
to settle and accomplish stepping stones.

You love the smell of burned wood in the air:
of roasted nuts and dates and tender meat.
These smells though I can't see, so be aware
of our polluted water, of the heat.

"[C]ome watch the sea bring us all its treasure."*
And rats indulging on our waste reserve.

"The hospital would just dump their raw garbage on the dump—bloody body parts, blankets, and everything. We were subject to that. And then they would burn this dump every so often. There would be walls of fire and toxic smoke, and we used to run through that fire to get the metals before they melted because we scavenged off the dump. We had to. You had to do that to survive."- Eddie Carvery

*From Shauntay Grant's children's book, *Africville*

Poem 4.1 "Dump Fire in Africville"

Bedford Basin: Excerpts from and Beyond the *Africville Relocation Report*

This Land

Song by C. Shelley Hamilton

Chorus

This land is gods earth, the grass is green earth
Belonging first to, folks of first nations birth

From Eden on word, to our north star Canaan

Our land's the first peoples turf

The original Africville settlers were, then, former residents of the refugee settlements at Preston and Hammonds Plains who moved to Africville in order to escape economic hardships encountered on rocky and barren land. In the 1840's, the Africville site offered several advantages. It was not significantly more arable but, located on **Bedford Basin,** it was convenient for fishing and, most important, it was convenient for wage labour in the Halifax area. Around 1839, with the establishment of a steamship line for mail service, Halifax received a long-awaited economic boom. The following decade was characterized by economic expansion, a flourishing wholesale trade, development o
the twentieth c
In the years ahe
athletic teams
school. At the t
common geogr
a deviant slum

In 1855 the railway linked the community with the "outside world". It was the closeness to **Bedford Basin** that the land became increasingly important for power and industrial site.

As the city of Halifax grew, in population and in industry, Africville became cluttered with railway tracks and industry and city service depots (e.g., the city dump). By the decade preceding relocation, Africville's rural image had little substance. City ordinances and the encroachment of industry and government had led to a disappearance of farm animals, and pollution of **Bedford Basin** had virtually eliminated fishing
1960's the editor of a Halifax newspaper felt
the "last rural remnant in Halifax peninsula",
could welcome the relocation because, as on
woman". By this time, however, Africville's ru
of being located "off the beaten path" and lac
This sprawling community of approximately t
dwellings, sheds, and outdoor privies haphaza
possessed few urban facilities. Residents had
even dust deterrent), convenient public trans
or garbage collection. The neglect of Africville
that, according to one elderly relocate, "for m
were led to believe they were in the Country-
only when the younger-generation came alon
within the city".

An important factor in Africville's historicity was the condition of being ecologically isolated from Halifax proper. As the map of Halifax shown on page 65 illustrates, Africville was set apart from the rest of the city, situated on **Bedford Basin** and flanked by the railway. Although linked to Halifax proper by a railway and an unpaved road almost ·since its first settlement, traditionally Africville was more an isolated rural community than an urban neighbourhood. Africville used to be separated from the rest of the city by bush and rock: one elderly relocate recalled that, prior
ound [Africville] there was
-time residents mentioned
, horses, goats) in Africville
local observer, referring to
community boasted some

Being poor means not only less likelihood of obtaining necessary facilities and services; it also involves the strong likelihood of receiving negative consideration. For Africville, this meant that the City was less than rigorous in enforcing housing standards and, by declining to issue building permits, in encouraging the orderly residential development of the area. The ultimate negative consideration in Africville's case occurred during the 1950's when the City moved its open dump from within walking distance of Africville to the very door- step of the community. This action was a "finishing touch" that established Africvflle clearly as "the-slum by the dump". Africville became known as a place to visit if one were interested in observing slum conditions.

"The City didn't do anything to improve Africville. All the City did was to try and get it, and they did, in the end. They just did it, too, because we were coloured. If they had been White people down there, the City would have been in there assisting them to build new homes, putting in water and sewers and building the place up. There were places around Halifax worse than Africville was, and the City didn't do to them what they did to Africville."

As I look onward, and see our nation
Feeling blistered, battered but not broken
Look to the ancestors for truth and courage
In our land the first peoples turf

Chorus

"The area in which I grew up in was called Lake loon/Cherry, Brook/Preston area. These are black communities. I do remember as a young girl noticing the number of people I knew directly that were getting various forms of cancer—my mother dying of lung cancer herself. I always wondered if there were things in the land or in our area that might attribute to the high cancer rates I felt were evident in blacks in our area. I would be curious to know if there's been any investigative work regarding environmental studies and health since the 1980s." - C. Shelley Hamilton: from her interview with the poet.

where do the toxins in Bedford Basin return to? cells, semen, breast milk, urine, clouds, rain, water, fish—what to eat for supper?
what urban renewal can't fix
impacts on spirits, minds, and bodies
especially women: for our resistance and rights

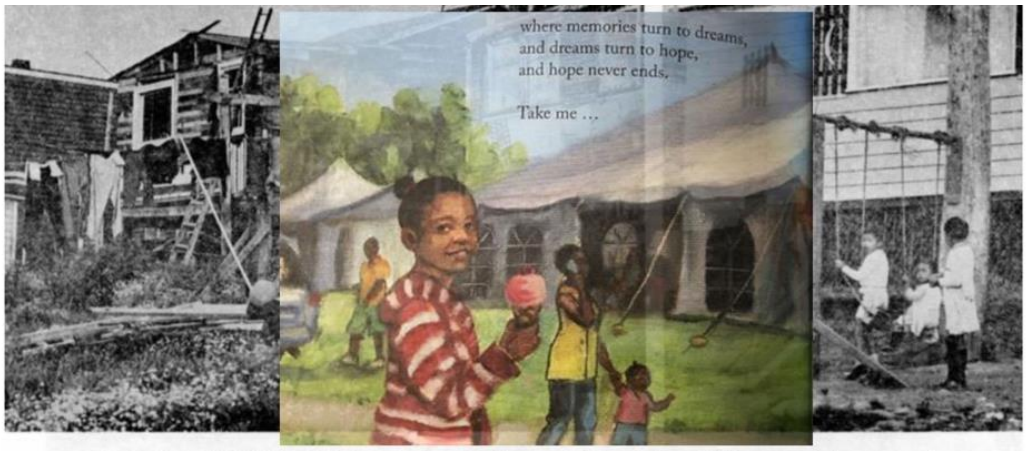


Plate 7. AFRICVILLE HOMES. Africville homes differed in quality and state of repair.
--Bob Brooks Photo

Plate 8. THE DUMP. The characterization of Africville as a slum became quite common once the Halifax City dump was moved, in the 1950's to the above site, only a short distance from houses and the Seaview African Baptist Church.
--Bob Brooks Photo

"Water for the Africville community was a conduit for telling many of the stories of our ancestors. Like my ancestors before me, storytelling taught me music… Especially older gospel pieces from my grandmother that I still know and remember" - C. Shelley Hamilton: from her interview with the poet

Plate 5. THE WELLS. Africville residents were not provided with water and sewage facilities by the City of Halifax. They improvised with an assortment of wells.
--Bob Brooks Photo

Poem 4.2 "Bedford Basin"

Carvery's quote is also separated from the poem to avoid creating conditions for essentialism. Black scholar Ashley N. Woodson explains essentialism as the practice of imposing qualities on a social group and representing all members of that group with those certain features/traits (320). Thus, essentialism erases the complexity and richness of a group's cultural life (320). Hence, I separate Carvery's experience from the poem to not mute the different Black identities and experiences of Africville. I use an excerpt from Shauntay Grant's children's book *Africville* (pictures by Eva Campbell) to juxtapose the imagery of rodents, contamination, and suffering with an image of resiliency, community and the feeling of home. By referring the reader to Grant's children's book, I position the reader, to echo Grant, to see Africville as "a vibrant, self-sustaining community that thrived despite the harshest opposition" through the simplicity and richness of Grant's poetic words and Eva Campbell's illustrations (qtd. in D'Entremont).

Woodson explains that master narratives (e.g., archives) about Black people and Black history also essentialize Black struggle (320). Woodson defines master narrative "as the dominant social mythologies that mute, erase, and neutralize features of racial struggle" (316). As a result, Black struggle and resistance are distilled down to simplistic and disconnected portraits of historical figures and moments (323). The *Africville Relocation Report* (1971) I use to extract passages for my poem "Bedford Basin" also works as a master narrative, simplifying the historical and contemporary difficulties of environmental racism. There are many instances in the report that, to unpack its main question—"What were the origins of the death of Africville?"—and untangle its "complex web" (Clairmont and McGill 129), depict Africville's environmental racism, poverty, and exploitation as originating from one devastating moment in history. For instance, one passage I use for the poem states that the "ultimate negative

consideration in Africville's case occurred during the 1950s when the City moved its open dump from within walking distance of Africville to the very doorstep of the community" (77). For the report, moving the city dump to Africville defines the moment Africville was considered a slum and "officially" neglected by the city. The report also states that due to poverty, the community was facing these "negative considerations." Yet, other sections of the report (which I also place in the poem) portray how "the Africville site offered several advantages" because it was located near the Bedford Basin (48). There, the community flourished by selling their fish and sustaining their community away from the city's anti-Black racism (48). Africville's proximity to Bedford Basin also made the land "increasingly important for power and industrial use" (136). The report fails to make race explicit, obscuring it with discussions of class and certain moments as the "ultimate" determinants of the Black struggle, thus muting the specificity of Black Nova Scotian experiences with environmental racism.

Africville's Black struggle cannot be localized or reduced to one moment in history that shows when/why Black bodies were subjected to racism/oppression. Rather, the "improving eye" of empirical technologies of oppression, such as the hazardous services placed in Africville (fertilizer plant, slaughterhouses, the Infectious Diseases Hospital) and the expropriation of Africville homes via bulldozers, condition an anti-Black climate where Black bodies must constantly and immanently survive an always-changing world with past, present, and future traumas. As Hamilton states, "the community does come together to have a picnic every year at the park/site where Africville once was, but the community is still dealing with the scars of that trauma from the late 60s to the last home demolished in 1970." Each shattered fragment in "Bedford Basin" rejects the historical linear consciousness of the master narrative for openings of Black consciousness to occur. For instance, I collide quotes from the report in "Bedford Basin"

to rupture an instance of Black suffering into the excess space at the bottom of the page where you can hear a Black woman talk about her experience growing up in Africville:

> The City didn't do anything to improve Africville. All the City did was to try and get it, and they did, in the end. They just did it, too, because we were coloured. If they had been White people down there, the City would have been in there assisting them to build new homes, putting in water and sewers and building the place up. There were places around Halifax worse than Africville was, and the City didn't do to them what they did to Africville. (Clairmont and McGill 12)

Her experience portrays Black suffering and survival as separate from the struggles of other poor areas in Halifax and thus questions the settler logic that determines who is visible/invisible and who is in place/out of place.

The poem "Bedford Basin" appropriates the aesthetic practices of the "improving eye," via collision and layering (extracting and combining (re)sources) to underscore the process of "sympoesis" for Black bodies; that is, their ongoingness of "becoming-with" their community/environments to survive and resist environmental racism. For example, I layer the first two stanzas of Hamilton's song "The Land" around and beside the excerpts from the *Relocation Report* to amplify how Black liberation and solidarity come from "individual and collective experiences of resistance, opposition, and agency" (Waldron 132). Hamilton states that through her song, she acknowledges her Indigenous ancestors. They helped her African ancestors survive and understand "this land" when they escaped slavery and settled in Ontario (Eden and Canaan) and Nova Scotia. Thus, I use Hamilton's song to decenter, subvert, and disrupt the narrative of helplessness portrayed in the report and instead reassert Black resistance through Black counter-knowledges of land relations with Indigenous peoples and African ancestors. I

also place part of the song lyric starting with "As I look onward" beside the testimony of a female Africville resident to highlight Hamilton's sentiment that Africville ancestors compel Black resistance: "I literally feel the ancestors coming to me and telling me they want their stories to be heard" (Hamilton). Thus, through my poem, I push toward a rereading, reimagining, and re-centring of Africville and Black struggle and resistance.

"Dump Fire in Africville" and "Bedford Basin" also work to reposition the reader to the poem with a response-ability to the racism and environmental hazards in Africville that continue to affect Black Nova Scotians today. Ingrid R. G Waldron explains in her book, *There's Something In the Water* (2018), that "colonizers demonstrate innocent forms of ignorance characterized by their lack of knowledge about how they benefit from white skin colour privilege" (132). Thus, the journey the colonizer takes through works of decolonization must reposition them to develop an understanding of how the privileges they enjoy are "are tied to the oppression experienced by the colonized" (132). In this same journey, the colonized peoples can only engage in acts of resistance when they realize "that the material benefits enjoyed by the colonizer have been accrued at their expense" (132). Through the (inter-textual) relations created between the quotes, images, and my poetry, I recompose a response-ability to Africville and its past, current, and future ancestors. For example, in "Bedford Basin," I place Hamilton's description of her experience living in the Cherry Brook area with my poetic writings so Hamilton's questions (about her mother's death from lung cancer) can annotate mine: where do the toxins in Bedford Basin return to? With Hamilton's question and my own, I position/provoke the reader to do their own research to understand how the Basin's polluted waters during the time of Africville still affect the Black communities in Nova Scotia; how the water travels within our cells, breast milk, semen, clouds, and returns to our waters and land. Waldron also explains in

her book that "even relatively low concentrations of certain pollutants in Halifax, Nova Scotia" increase women's risk of giving birth to children with inherited malformations such as congenital heart defects (129). Thus, when I end my poetic piece with "especially women: for our resistance and rights," I allude to the negative effects of toxic exposure on a woman's body. How a woman's exposure to toxic chemicals affects her reproductive rights and "the grassroots organizing and resistance activities" that Indigenous women and women of colour lead in their communities (130). My poem then works with the energy of adapting and changing toward the possibility of forming heterogeneous relations that forge paths for coexistence through the act of response-ability for both the colonizer and colonized.

The second part of the "Bedford Basin" poem with the black and white pictures from the report and the colour illustrations from the children's book reveals Africville residents and future generations "staying with the trouble" of a polluted, neglected, and exploited community to continue surviving, rupturing, and existing in places of anti-Blackness. By layering the black and white images with the colourful illustrations, I juxtapose images from the report that show Africville in ruins with vibrant reimaginings of some of Africville's landmarks and traditions: "Tibby's Pond, the Caterpillar Tree, the bonfires down by the water and the Bedford Basin" (qtd. in D'Entremont). For example, the black and white image of the landfill with the caption reading "Africville as a slum" is juxtaposed with an illustration from Grant's book that shows a Black girl beside the table dinner with apple pie and bread on the table. Thus, the smell of the dump is contrasted with "smells like sweet apple pie and blueberry duff" (Grant 8). One black and white photograph, in particular, stands out that shows three Black children playing on the swings beside their home. If all the other photos portray despair and disconnect due to the black and white nature of the pictures, this picture of the children shows hope and beauty. The illustration of a Black girl

holding ice cream in Grant's book also annotates the black and white picture of the children on the swings so the reader can witness these children playing, surviving, and existing with their community. Hence, as Grant states, it is important to remember Africville and its residents celebrating the community still, even with the traumas of the past and the hardships of the present (D'Entremont).

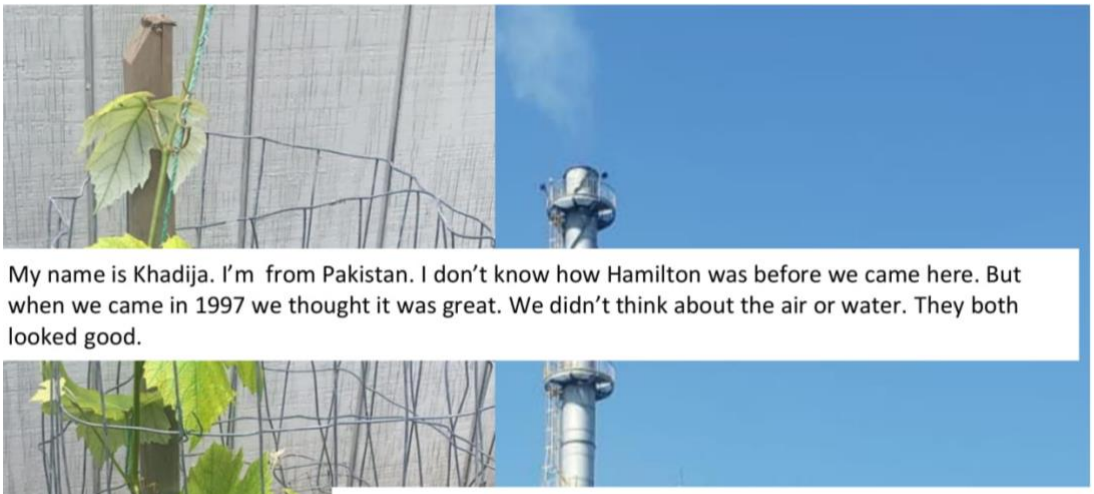
Ultimately, Black collective victory cannot be from reports/peoples/Histories that still dominate Black existence. Black collective victory must come from the possibilities of breakages and ruptures in all forms of Black domination, such as master narratives that overlook the interrelated facets that create the Black experience (environmental racism, poverty, capitalist growth, and ongoing revolution/resistance). “Dump Fire in Africville” and “Bedford Basin” move against those enclosures (found in the *Africville Relocation Report*) and break open a creative space to look critically at the text/poem and try to understand different perspectives (from “othered” beings) that are drowned out.

4.2 Hamilton Harbour

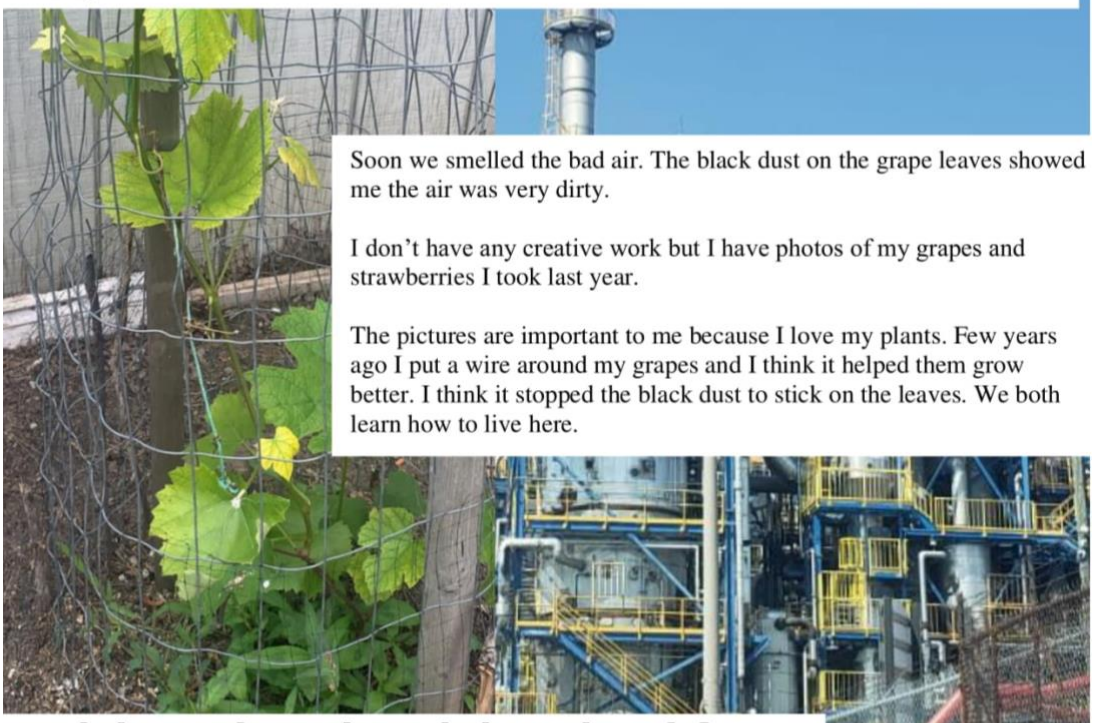
Since the 1970s, Hamilton Harbour's steel industry is no longer the "pride of Hamilton's city government" for "the "steel mills; the smoke stacks; the jumble of buildings; the docks piled with ore and coal" have become a symbol of "what went wrong with Hamilton," Ontario (Wakefield and McMullan 303). Northeast Hamilton is situated near the industrial sector of Hamilton, Ontario and is adjacent to the harbour that was used as a dumping ground for raw sewage and industrial waste until the late 1960s (303). Today, Northeast Hamilton has a greater proportion of low-income households and visible minorities than in the past (304). As a result of high exposure to the polluted waters and air from the Harbour, Northeast residents have high rates of ill-health, with "more hospitalisation for 'preventable' illnesses," and babies who have lower birth weights (304). My poem "An Interview with Khadija: Grapes, Strawberries, The Goose" (see Poem 4.3) redacts by blacking out portions of Sarah Wakefield and Colin McMullan's article, "Healing in Places of Decline," and layers them with my photos and an interview with a Northeast resident, Khadija, to reveal why the "improving eye" "re-imag[es] Hamilton from a centre of growth to a 'place on the margin'" (309).

An Interview with Khadija: Grapes, Strawberries, The Goose

Grapes



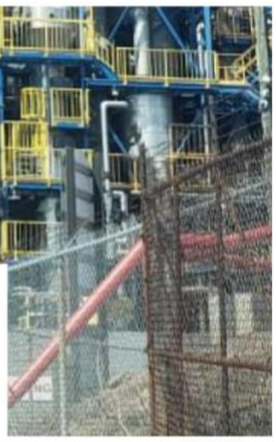
My name is Khadija. I'm from Pakistan. I don't know how Hamilton was before we came here. But when we came in 1997 we thought it was great. We didn't think about the air or water. They both looked good.



Soon we smelled the bad air. The black dust on the grape leaves showed me the air was very dirty.

I don't have any creative work but I have photos of my grapes and strawberries I took last year.

The pictures are important to me because I love my plants. Few years ago I put a wire around my grapes and I think it helped them grow better. I think it stopped the black dust to stick on the leaves. We both learn how to live here.



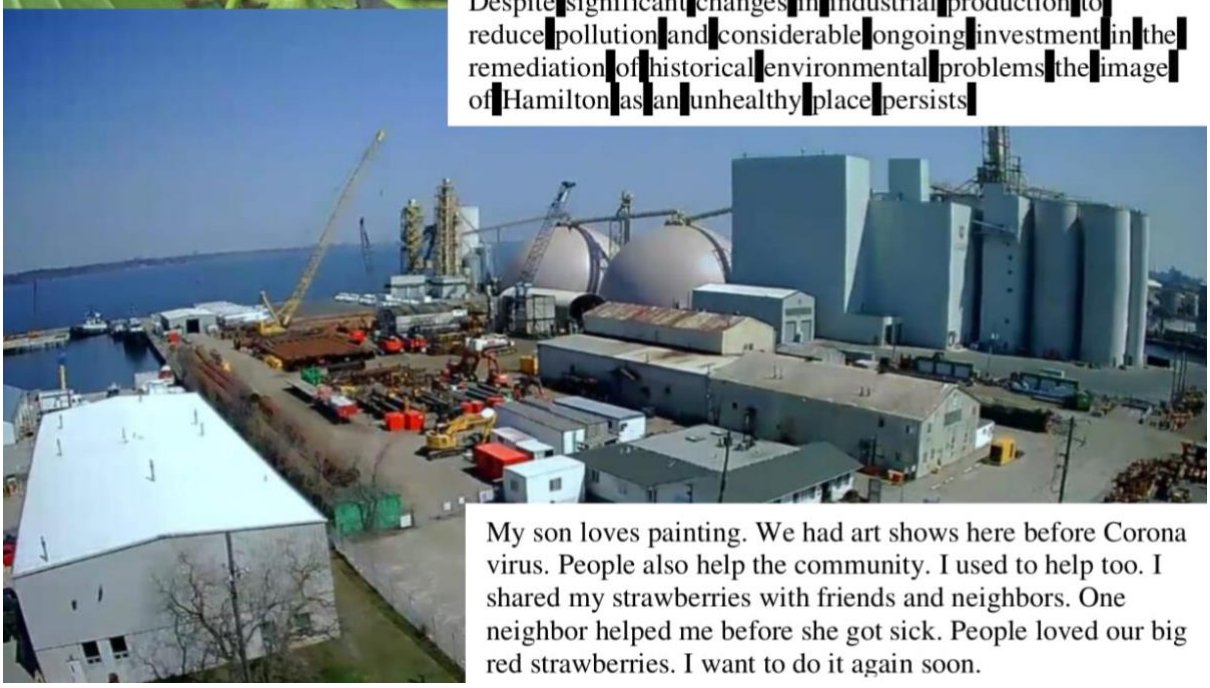
From Sarah Wakefield and Colin McMullan's article, "Healing in Places of Decline."

While the therapeutic landscape literature has generally focused on exploring exceptionally health affirming places this paper has explored the image of Hamilton as an unhealthy place and the ways that local residents negotiate this image in order to recreate Hamilton or parts thereof as a therapeutic or at least health maintaining setting for everyday life. This process of image reconstruction occurred at two scales. At the regional level some residents particularly local politicians planners and journalists have actively challenged the dominant image of Hamilton as an unhealthy city and have attempted to re define it as a natural inviting place. At the local level residents have re negotiated the dominant image of Hamilton by emphasizing the health affirming characteristics of locally significant places and by drawing imagined boundaries between the healthy and unhealthy neighbourhoods of the city.

Strawberries

The community is different compared to a few years ago because factories are getting bigger.

Despite significant changes in industrial production to reduce pollution and considerable ongoing investment in the remediation of historical environmental problems, the image of Hamilton as an unhealthy place persists.



My son loves painting. We had art shows here before Corona virus. People also help the community. I used to help too. I shared my strawberries with friends and neighbors. One neighbor helped me before she got sick. People loved our big red strawberries. I want to do it again soon.

The Goose

Hamilton has one hurdle to cross which is the perception out there that it's a dirty city. The perception was certainly true at one point in time. I don't think it's necessarily true anymore. I don't think that you can point to Hamilton and say it's worse than anywhere else. I don't think that's true. We may not be as good as others but we're certainly not worse than most. Local Politician

Poem 4.3 "Grapes," "Strawberries, " "The Goose"

"Healing in Places of Decline" (2005) is a compilation of interviews with residents and city officials, newspapers and reports, and the experiences of both authors as residents of Hamilton. The article uses the interviews, reports, and experiences to explore the image of Hamilton as an unhealthy place and the ways that residents, specifically in Northeast Hamilton, negotiate this image to recreate Hamilton, and their communities, "as a therapeutic—or at least health-maintaining—setting for everyday life" (Wakefield and McMullan 308). For "many outsiders," the article explains, the North End is considered "poor, ugly, polluted and dangerous" (qtd. in 306), and even some Hamiltonians blame "marginal" people for living in

Northeast Hamilton because these "people don't care where they live," making it "their choice of neighborhood" (307). The "improving eye" of industrialization renders People of Colour as overburden who are "meant" to live in Hamilton's polluted areas; as the authors explain, the image of Northeast Hamilton is "grounded in social processes and power relations, and are legitimated through processes of hegemony and resistance" (300). My poem complicates the narrative of Wakefield and McMullan's article on how Hamilton can heal by simply reconstructing its image (from an "ugly blue-collar town") at the regional and local levels (308) when there are many social, political, and environmental factors preventing community resurgence.

By way of redaction, my poem ruptures (shown by the black bars in-between Wakefield and McMullan's statements on the importance of Hamilton's image reconstruction) the article only momentarily, opposing the notion that IBPOC communities in Hamilton can heal from ongoing industrial pollution through a "(re)negotia[tion] [of] the dominant image of Hamilton" (Wakefield and McMullan 305). The black bars in the poem create a sense of entrapment and become a barrier to reading the words easily to portray the aesthetic practices of the "improving eye" (the gaze that determines people/nonhuman nature as valuable or overburden) as a form of systemic oppression that cannot easily be removed by choosing how Hamilton is perceived by "outsiders" and residents. Rather, by layering Khadija's experiences with contrasting images of Northeast Hamilton, I portray how healing with our polluted environments requires attending to the particular difficulties of negotiating with both human and nonhuman beings. In the "Grapes" section of the poem, both Khadija's grapevines and the image I took of the Stelco Holding steel mill have wires/fences surrounding them. The wire is used to protect the industry as they manufacture steel and pollute the air and waters. Yet, for Khadija, the wires help her

plants grow and teach them "both … how to live here" with each other. Thus, the image of the wire has two different meanings: in one instance, it dictates progress and Hamilton's economic well-being, and in the other instance, it portrays the cooperation of two different beings, negotiating how they can coexist together while facing similar environmental, social, and political conditions. Thus, my poem highlights why "staying with the trouble" of our dark ecology begins with a radical reposition in how we understand healing and existing in/with an industrial city.

Hamilton's steel industry is not just a polluting machine but a determinant in how public policies and industrial practices are formed, which often results in minority groups bearing the costs of economic development "that have benefited the region as a whole" (Wakefield and McMullan 309). The "improving eye" of Hamilton's steel industry does not simply plan what becomes overburden—the human and nonhuman beings removed from healthy places and relocated/conditioned to other surfaces (contaminated by pollutants). Rather, as discussed in the "Capture" section, the "improving eye" is essentially a calling-forth of colonial/capitalist demands and power over "othered" beings and places. The "improving eye" is a continuous calling-forth of human and nonhuman nature into labour and product by focusing on "othered" communities (low-income and visible minority groups) as sacrifice zones for "improving life for all." Within sacrifice zones such as Northeast Hamilton, environmental racism unequally exposes minority populations to environmental health hazards (like air and water pollution) because there are "broad social processes" that justify the "benefiti[ing] of certain regions and social groups over others" (300).

My poem stresses the financial, environmental, and social barriers of living in sacrifice zones—through the relation between the redacted parts of Wakefield and McMullan's article,

Khadija's interview answers, and the juxtaposition of images of Northeast Hamilton. In a study conducted by Gallina and Williams (2014), there is a correlation between air pollution exposure and Hamilton's neighbourhood dwelling values. The report indicates that residents of Northeast Hamilton, where on average socioeconomic status (SES) is low, endure greater air pollution exposure compared to residents of high SES, living in the upper City of Hamilton (called "Mountain" residents for living above the escarpment) (67). The study also portrays a significant relationship between low-income residents, unemployment, and low housing costs in areas (where the industrial sector is concentrated) with greater exposure to air pollution (73). Sacrifice zones are thus spaces where environmental policies differentially affect and disadvantage individuals, groups, or communities based on race or colour (as well as socioeconomic status) (Lerner 6). For example, in the Beasley Neighbourhood, 57 percent of residents live on incomes below the poverty line, and 39 percent identify as visible minority versus 14 percent in the city (City of Hamilton, "Beasley"); almost half of the young children in Jamesville are living in poverty, and 21 percent of residents identify as a visible minority (City of Hamilton, "Jamesville"); and 44 percent of McQuesten residents live in poverty, and 22 percent identify as a visible minority (City of Hamilton, "McQuesten"). The reality of disadvantaged communities is that they lack the resources, political power, and mobility to move away from areas falling into industrial and environmental decline. Thus, for most Northeast residents, "the choice of neighbourhood is not unlimited," as residential mobility is restricted by income and access to capital, and most disadvantaged households rarely have enough capital to buy elsewhere (Wakefield and McMullan 307-308). Few residents of Northeast Hamilton are employed in the steel industry, and those who are employed earn enough money "to move to more affluent neighborhoods" (303). These groups are thus a target

of environmental racism, which is reinforced by political and economic institutions (Lerner 171).

My creative techniques (redaction, rupture, layering) accent the thresholds—the tensions of the toxic sublime—that control Hamilton's watery places and human/nonhuman relations. My poem shows that the development of the steel industry and power over Hamilton Harbour is tied up with the development of social power in Hamilton: the growth and development of industries like Stelco Holdings Inc. and ArcelorMittal Dofasco (two of the major still mills in Hamilton) are toward increasing the economy of the city, but its implication is growth in social hierarchy and domination. The colonial/capitalist call for modernity is a violent and ongoing racist act of domination over all on Earth at the expense of polluting environments and beings that cannot conform to the dictates of colonial/capitalist progress. Hence, our work (as activists, citizens, scientists, politicians) is not to prove "the health-affirming nature" of Hamilton, as the article suggests (Wakefield and McMullan 308), but to confront practices of environmental racism, reinforced by government and economic institutions (Lerner 171).

To confront environmental racism, we must first understand the social hierarchy at play, such as Hamilton's municipal government, the provincial government (including the Ministry of Environment (MOE)), and industrial corporations like Dofasco. For example, in an interview conducted by Gallina and Williams, a Northeast female resident expresses her frustration with government inaction and believes her community "won't be able to [improve air quality], until they move the factories, which will never happen" (qtd. in 72). She reiterates a common sentiment among Northeast residents: the burden and exhaustion of demanding cleaner and safer industrial methods when "the city does not care." It is not hard to imagine why the city

would work to relax cleanup and management standards when the "biggest primary steel manufacturers are the largest private-sector employers in the city … support[ing] a wide variety of community initiatives, including softball leagues, park development" (Wakefield and McMullan 303). In this manner, the "improving eye" controls not only nonhuman nature to create valuable products such as steel but also social and political conditions.

In Samantha Lawrence-Nametka's thesis "North End Narratives: Grid-Group Analysis for Environmental Justice in Hamilton, Ontario" (2016), she interviews an environmental activist, Elizabeth, who volunteers for Environmental Hamilton's (a not-for-profit environmental organization) INHALE initiative. Part of the initiative is collecting air quality data using a mobile air monitor in the Jamesville/Beasley and Crown Point neighbourhoods (adjacent to the industrial sectors) and sending it to the MOE and the City of Hamilton for review and environmental action. Yet, Elizabeth worries that her reports to the MOE are not making an impact: "I continue to ask the Ministry to report back to me on what's being done . . . but I never hear back from them" (qtd. in Lawrence-Nametka 30). Allen, who lives in Crown Point, also believes the industrial emissions and water pollution have scarcely improved during his time living in Hamilton because the provincial government fails to monitor and regulate Hamilton's industry (qtd. in 30). Several Environmental Hamilton volunteers have expressed disappointment in the provincial government for their decision to grant Dofasco a five-year extension on "improving environmental performance"—enabling them to continue polluting the Harbor and releasing emissions—after fining the company in 2014 for several pollution infractions (34). In 2018, two years after the provincial government granted Dofasco a five-year extension to improve their environmental performance, Environmental Hamilton documented a significant "black plume" emitted from the Dofasco factory (Lawson). Just

recently, on May 25, 2021, Dofasco entered a guilty plea in court for violating Section 46(1) of the "Air Pollution – Local Air Quality" made under the Environmental Protection Act by releasing large pollution in 2018 (Lawson). The company has been fined a total of $268,750 for the violation (Lawson). Therefore, the government's inaction and lack of monitoring standards strengthen environmental inequality and perceptions of environmental risk as "othered."

Hamilton will not heal if we continue to pollute its air and waters and "destabilize the uniformity of Hamilton's unhealthy image" by "re-defin[ing] it as a natural, inviting place" (Wakefield and McMullan 308). This redefinition of Hamilton is a simplification of the toxic sublime by the industry and governments; they romanticize a city without "poor, ugly, polluted, and dangerous" areas, yet insist the steel industry must continue to expand, or at least be modified, for the city's economic growth (309). If the steel industry is no longer the "pride of Hamilton's city government," it is not from recognizing the industry's ongoing violence on human and nonhuman nature. Rather, what is at stake is a realization that the pollution and vulnerable areas of Hamilton are "associating the city with a set of negative images: a declining economic base, pollution, a city on the downward slide" (qtd. in 300). Thus, the pollution "meant" for the sacrifice zones is now crossing imaginary boundaries and seeping into the city of Hamilton as a whole, causing Hamilton to look and smell bad (qtd. in 303). Minority communities then become a scapegoat for the problems of Hamilton as a whole (307). The "improving eye," therefore, dictates where we are from and how we connect with our environments through an amnesiac effect on our spatial mobility, affecting how we perceive space. The "improving eye" is intensified when "the effects of [the] capital strip and colonize the terrain of remembrance, transforming lands and waters beyond recognition" (Chen et al. 44). We (Hamiltonians, IBPOC peoples, "outsiders") are positioned to view Hamilton on a

particular fixed scale where the Northeast "bears the brunt of the environmental burden from the city's economic muscle," while other communities are sheltered from the centre and source of Hamilton's pollution (qtd. in Wakefield and McMullan 306). Governments and residents are disappointed when they see Hamilton looked down upon because Northeast Hamilton now stands in for all of Hamilton. My poem then asks us to look at human and nonhuman communities in multi-scalar and unsettled terms to not just "prove" Hamilton as a "health-maintaining" place but to capture the spatial and temporal complexities of where and how we dwell.

My poem transforms the article's logic of visibility by demonstrating why a destabilization of Hamilton's unhealthy image, "re-defin[ing] it as a natural, inviting place," is not enough when these perceptions fall back into political impotence and indifference toward Hamilton's ongoing ecological crises. My poem emphasizes the active and creative forms of coexisting and healing in Northeast Hamilton, not because these places are "health-affirming" but rather through the residents' ability to survive and coexist in their dark ecology: "to "inherit the layers upon layers of living and dying that infuse every place" (Haraway 138).

Instead of insisting why, "[d]espite significant changes in industrial production to reduce pollution[,] the image of Hamilton as an unhealthy place persists" (Wakefield and McMullan 305), I portray why it is necessary to reinforce this image of Hamilton as "unhealthy" to undermine the "significant changes" that continue to pollute and marginalize human and nonhuman beings. By appropriating the aesthetic practices of the "improving eye," I extract, redact, and layer parts of the article, to articulate a different conceptual starting point to view Hamilton's polluted environments. The layering of images with redacted parts of the article reposition our (poet's and reader's) orientation to Hamilton and its sacrifice zones

through an opening of a picture and then a discussion. For example, in the "Strawberries" section of the poem, I juxtapose Khadija's picture of her strawberries with my picture of the Soletanche Bachy Canada Industry to portray how healing, existence, and resistance come from small (and persistent) actions of growth, embodied by the strawberries. Khadija's interview answers also juxtapose images of healthy and unhealthy through her description of her "big red strawberries" and her sick friend, which also portrays why healing in places of decline is not dependent on spaces that are health-affirming versus health-denying. Rather, through the placement of Khadija's interview questions on the images, I show how healing is a commitment to the existence of other beings—the ones both human and nonhuman, in the past and future. This opening and discussion "re-images" Northeast Hamilton outside of human's conditions/choices of healing and existing, which, as explained by Morton, fall back into consumerism and extractive ideology (691). Thus, to improve quality of life in Hamilton and work toward long-term solutions requires us to see the healing aspects of Hamilton not in specific zones/areas (e.g. Niagara Escarpment and the Royal Botanical Gardens (Wakefield and McMullan 305)) or social connections between some humans (as the article demonstrates), but immersed in our healthy and unhealthy connections with the environment which is tangible, material, personal and collective.

My found poem is about the relations of the movements of hidden flows (of water, relations, survival) and why taking up their challenge determines the future and rights of nonhuman beings and minority groups. Thus, the goal should not just be revamping Hamilton's image as a whole (to subvert the image of the city as "that smelly town by the lake" (qtd. in Wakefield and McMullan 305)) but to position provincial governments, local industries, and residents of Hamilton to pay attention to the particular difficulties of sacrifice zones. Under the

logic of the "improving eye," there are always other places under greater distress in relation to others. There is always inherent beauty/success in sacrifice zones: increased investments and initiatives (309). For instance, in the article, a local politician explains why Hamilton is not "worse than anywhere else" since Hamilton is "certainly not worse than most" (qtd. in 305). The authors also state that "air and water quality in Hamilton is now not significantly different from nearby urban centres" (304). Hence, in "The Goose" section, I layer the politician's quote with images from Bayfront Park Beach that shows a warning sign about the toxicity of the water and Khadija's quote about the beach closing down in 2018 and is still closed today.

By redacting Wakefield and McMullan's article and layering it with images from Northeast Hamilton, I highlight residents of Northeast Hamilton coexisting and healing with human and nonhuman nature. Northeast residents do not choose to live with pollution and cannot choose how people view their communities, but rather, as Morton says, they are on the side of "no choice at all," where they have to engage with their dark ecology to help their communities heal. To heal with our polluted environments requires a problematization of the logics of globalization rather than "proving" the "healthiness of [our] own neighborhoods," as Wakefield and McMullan argue. Re-imaging Hamilton as "healthy places" asserts the simplification of the toxic sublime that sees sacrifice zones and nature as resilient places of extraordinary accomplishments for providing valuable resources like steel. My poem asks that we attend to the particular difficulties of the "local place image" (Wakefield and McMullan 301) and our own positions in relation to this image (to the "improving eye"). To heal with our polluted environments (and break free from the local place image, not just "improve it") requires us to adhere to the gravitational forces of other nonhuman subjectivities that create the environments we need for survival.

4.3 Athabasca River

In the article, "This Is the World's Most Destructive Oil Operation-and It's Growing," Stephen Leahy talks about Canada's hypocritical stance on mitigating climate change while increasing its oil exports and its oil sands operations in Alberta. For about a century now (since the 1960s), oil companies in northeastern Alberta have extracted large bitumen and heavy crude deposits from the ground while polluting the Athabasca River with deadly toxins (Leahy). These harmful toxins grossly impact the health and lifestyle of the Cree, Chipewyan, and Métis peoples living downstream (Leahy). The article describes the oil sands operations scattered along the banks of the Athabasca River as "one of the world's largest collections of tailings waste ponds—able to fill more than 500,000 Olympic swimming pools" (Leahy). The ponds are so toxic that "ducks and other birds have to be prevented from going near them" (Leahy). Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, said in the article that the oil sands have "been very destructive to the environment and [the Indigenous] communities in the region" (qtd. in Leahy). The toxins in the Athabasca River have been affecting the caribou, bison, moose, birds, and fish population, which have also significantly impacted the Indigenous peoples' ability to travel and gather food, affecting their health and economic well-being (Leahy). By appropriating the practices of extractive technologies of violence, my three poems (see Poem 4.4), "Contact," "Impact," and" 'Treating Making,'" break the space inside Leahy's article to expose the "improving eye" of the oil sands operations that render Indigenous peoples and their territories as overburden.

"We don't have proper running water. If we had clean running water instead of out of a tank, the health of this community would be a lot more. But we don't have that" - Jeff Wastisicoot from the *Indigenous Climate Action* organization.

Contact

Scattered along the banks of the Athabasca River is one of the world's largest collections of tailings waste ponds—able to fill more than 500,000 Olympic swimming pools. These are so toxic; ducks and other birds have to be prevented from going near them.

I belong to Generation C
we read post-
colonial literature on
colonial
land we are

Impact

born
with
ink
in water
we write
on issues
volumes
on Indigenous rights
on water-
proof paper

"It's had a huge impact on the water, the forest. It has hunt food from the land—it's Deranger, a member of the located near Fort Chipewyan, caribou, bison, moose, birds, fish, affected our ability to travel, to really overwhelming, "says Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation north of Fort McMurray.

"We need to draw on our knowledges from our past experiences and also our teachings from our communities and knowledge holders to look at what it means to move through this crisis from an Indigenous perspective...to utilize our culture and ways of being" - Eriel Tchekwie Deranger from the *Indigenous Climate Action* organization.

‘Treaty Making’

"They [Suncor and Syncrude] put a pipeline through wetlands just because people will never live there …

We actually don’t have enough wetlands in the province to support our environment."

“Indigenous peoples are often being widely opposed to oil and development—that’s simply not There are many indigenous communities who have built, and to build, a prosperous economic working with industry,”

The McKay First Nation is an exceptional example.

it has recently sued Alberta government to stop a that would consume some of its traditional hunting lands. But to 2016 it earned an average revenue of more than $500 providing services to the oil sands

colonial
water
evaporates
to reconciliation
lost to
oppression
genocide

division
attempts to erase
Indigenous cultures
with water
his-

story, her story, their story

speaks
water to
generation C
seizes
words
and mines
raw sentences
to condemn
the Euro-
centric
colonial
culture
conquering
country
Ka-
nata

"Wetlands play an important ecological service in terms of water regimes and habitat for wildlife…[they] absorb water from spring snowmelt and summer storms, reducing flooding, erosion and sedimentation and recharging the water table in times of drought"- Helene Walsh from the Keepers of the Athabasca.

seen as
natural gas
the case.

continue
future by

the
project
last
from 2012
annual
million by
industry,

-qtd. in Keepers of the Athabasca, "Interviews with Traditional Knowledge Holders" 12.

Poem 4.4 "Contact," "Impact," and "'Treaty Making'"

My three poems here rupture Leahy's article to respond from a position that respects Indigenous knowledges and struggle by engaging with Indigenous voices/stories from the *Indigenous Climate Action* website and Keepers of the Athabasca organization while speaking from within the limitations of a settler voice/perspective. My first poem, "Contact," animates the dilemma of living in Canada, where we push forward postcolonial narratives (and multiculturalism) while living on settler-colonial land with colonial policies of exploitation. Subsequently, my second poem, "Impact," is about Indigenous struggle and resistance that undermine colonial practices by using water (what is in water and the life sustained by water) as proof ("water-proof") and witness to the effects of the oil sands operations.

Emerging Indigenous-led organizations are growing to support Indigenous peoples' climate change discourses and Indigenous sovereignty. The website *Indigenous Climate Action* was created in 2015 by Indigenous women in Alberta for Indigenous peoples to connect and share their rights and knowledge systems in response to the ongoing climate crises and violence on Indigenous communities ("Our Story"). The website has a section dedicated to COVID-19 and how to help Indigenous communities during the pandemic. In the website's "Webinar on COVID19 and Indigenous Communities," Eriel Tchekwie Deranger, a Dënesųłiné woman and member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, explains how Indigenous communities in Alberta are at a high risk of contracting the virus due to a lack of clean running water (4:39-4:56). Since the Athabasca river is polluted with toxins from the oil sands operations, Indigenous communities living near the banks of the River require water tanks to drink clean water. According to Jeff Wastisicoot, a language consultant and Knowledge Keeper from Pimicikamak Cree Nation, the water tanks are limited in number and capacity; hence, the community has to share these metal tanks, increasing their chances of spreading and retrieving

the virus (16:27-17:01). I use Indigenous knowledges from the website and border them around my poems to annotate the ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples with water pollution and underscore how Indigenous knowledges, practices, and culture can heal Indigenous communities. As Leahy underscores, Indigenous peoples are working together "to help communities make a transition away from oil and toward renewable energy projects, particularly those that are [I]ndigenous owned and operated." Ultimately, Indigenous peoples continue to resist the "improving eye" of extractive practices, especially when the industries are the only ones helping them invest in renewable energy, with the caveat that these industries continue their oil sands projects (Leahy).

My poem 'Treaty Making'" responds to Tim McMillan's assertions in Leahy's article on the importance of Canada's oil industries. McMillan, who is the president and CEO of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), believes Indigenous communities are not widely opposed to the oil industries because they are building a "prosperous economic future" working with them (qtd. in Leahy). His statements portray both the colonial (wo)man and the Indigenous (wo)man orienting themselves to the River through the "improving eye" of exploitation and extraction. However, it is the "improving eye" of McMillan that tolerates environmental devastation and Indigenous exploitation if it means "high growth markets" for Canada (Leahy). I use quotes from Indigenous members of the Keepers of the Athabasca to rupture McMillan's and Leahy's statistical/journalistic reportage/analysis with immediate and intimate voices. The Indigenous voices reveal the damage of the oil sands to the surrounding wetlands and how human and nonhuman environments depend on healthy wetlands. Through their spiritual ways of connecting with land and water, the Keepers of the Athabasca learn about the importance of wetlands, how they absorb water from snowmelt and summer storms and are

habitats for plants and species (Walsh 30). Yet, the oil industries are destroying the wetlands through the seepages of tailings materials (by-products of the extraction process used to separate the oil from sand) and the construction of pipelines through the wetlands. My poetic undoing of the article and my annotation through Indigenous voices emphasize why staying with the dark ecology of settler-colonial Canada (rather than "post-colonial" Canada) is necessary so that Indigenous struggle and resistance are not lost to colonial attempts at reconciliation.

In my interview with environmental activist Cleo Reece, she describes the sublime nature of the Athabasca River; its ability to defy human understanding and imagination of how it truly works, and thus why humans can't "control the waters, but we can learn how to change, shift, and evolve with the River, in a sort of resilient way" (Reece). For Reece, "surviving the harmful environmental effects of the oil industries in northern Alberta relies on Indigenous peoples, settlers, and governments to help protect Indigenous knowledges and support Indigenous water governance." Reece is from Fort McMurray No. 468 First Nation and the co-chair of the Keepers of the Athabasca organization; "a group of First Nations, Metis, Inuit, environmental and watershed citizens working to prevent further toxin releases from oil sands tailings into the River, and the withdrawal of water from the River which has adverse effects on the groundwater and surface water quantity." The organization was first called Keepers of the Water, founded in 2006, and two years later, in 2008, the organization expanded, and Keepers of the Athabasca was born as a sister organization. "The main objective of our organization," Reece explains, "is to look at the world in a holistic way. Everything is connected, and it is important we see this and strengthen our relationships with the water, land, animals, and each other. In Cree, we call this 'wahkohtowin,' which means all things are interconnected, and this

underlies everything that we do." Keepers of the Athabasca share Indigenous knowledges through conferences, exhibitions, water walks, and press releases on how humans can sustain the River's ecology, especially during our time of mass industrial pollution.

Reece emphasizes the important work their organization is doing to exercise Indigenous sovereignty and prevent further subjection of Indigenous peoples to settler-colonial practices of resource extraction. In September 2020, the Keepers of the Athabasca and Keepers of the Water were taken to court by Coalspur Mine for convincing Minister Jonathon Wilkinson to impede the Coalspur mine expansion due to the company's lack of federal environmental review for their proposed development of the coal mine (Keepers of the Athabasca, "Coalspur Court Case" 1). The expansion will impact endangered Rainbow Trout and Bull Trout in the Athabasca River and federally protected Treaty Rights (1). The oil sand mining will also affect groundwater levels. Once the mine pit is excavated, it is essential to reduce groundwater levels in the area to prevent flooding of the pit, resulting in the drying out of peatlands, wetlands, and other surface water bodies (Walsh 25). No amount of restoration can return the landscape of the mined area to its previous condition. The tailings materials will leak into the landscape with high concentrations of salt, bitumen and naphthenic acid, thus limiting the success of restoration (Walsh 35). Hence, a pause in new industrial projects, such as the Coalspur mine expansion, is crucial to provide Keepers of the Athabasca time to "develop and implement a regional strategic plan that includes long-term management objectives and a process for achieving these objectives" (Walsh 33). "There are limits established to prevent environmental damages to our waters and land," Reece explains, "but we still see existing projects denying those limits." According to Reece, "We need all beings to help sustain our biodiversity."

The "improving eye" of Alberta's oil companies crosses environmental limits and thresholds to initiate a process of simplification/clarification of the relations between Indigenous peoples and nonhuman beings in an attempt to weaken the power and possibility of these relations. Oil companies like Suncor have tailing ponds that release tailings water elevated with levels of hydrocarbons, naphthenic acids, and salinity into nearby wetlands, yet "the companies set their own plans for tailings management and submit their own research to be evaluated by the Alberta Energy Regulator. The Alberta government is keeping the door open for companies to 'treat' and release tailings to the Athabasca River" (Keepers of the Athabasca, " Coalspur Court Case" 1). Indigenous communities adjacent to the Athabasca River, such as Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay, express their concerns about the ecological destruction caused by the oil sands operations and the ongoing psychosocial effects on the communities. For example, Reece explains that Fort McKay Elders have noticed the water from the River "tasting oily, sour, and salty, and leaving behind a brown residue when boiled." A member of Fort Chipewyan expresses their frustration and fear of the industries: "In the last 50 years, they made it so you can't drink water, you can't eat the animals, that's an awful lot of change, a very big change. If they keep doing that for the other 50 years, I don't know how people are going to survive" (qtd. in Keepers of the Athabasca, "Interviews" 35). Despite concerns from Indigenous communities about the water quality and a decrease in performance and survival of vegetation species and animals, there is an apparent lack of regulatory oversight on the pace and scale of the oil sands operations from both the federal and provincial governments (Turner 456). "Their [the industries and Canadian governments] justification for everything is that we [Indigenous peoples] are generating wealth for our communities" (Reece). Specifically, in 2016, Chief Jim Boucher announced that Fort McKay First Nation is buying "a 35 percent stake in a Suncor tank farm for

$350 million (Turner 440). Thus, the "improving eye" simplifies and clarifies Indigenous peoples' ecological concerns and lifeways by categorizing them as capital growth and progress. The "improving eye" portrays a clear distinction between humans and nature, good causes and bad causes. Indigenous resistance, however, portrays no easy answers or solutions for surviving a disrupted ecology. Buying a stake in Suncor, for example, does not change the chief's "disposition toward the industry" (441). Instead, it reimagines a different position with the oil industries, one that requires patience for teasing open the knotted roots of expropriation and settler-colonial destructions under the guise of growth and improvement—"You take the good with the bad" (441).

Keepers of the Athabasca work with environmental scientists to stipulate current and unbiased data on the cumulative effects of the oil sands region of Alberta. In 2009, Keepers of the Athabasca released findings from Kevin P. Timoney and Peter Lee's study, "Does the Alberta Tar Sands Industry Pollute? The Scientific Evidence," which found increased PAHs in the oil sands region over time (Walsh 21). However, the Alberta Government insisted this information was faulty and engaged a group of independent scientists (Water Monitoring Data Review Committee) to re-examine the levels of PAHs (21). The independent scientists confirmed the presence and persistence of PAHs in the environment and their aquatic toxicity at the levels found in tailings ponds (21). Tailings ponds are engineered dam and dyke facilities used to store tailings materials, such as water, sand, residual bitumen, PAHs, naphthenic acids, mercury, and arsenic (20). Despite concerns about the persistence and aquatic toxicity of naphthenic acids, PAHs, mercury, and arsenic, the Alberta Environment does not have any regulations for these toxins (21). Thus, for the Keepers of the Athabasca, promoting and engaging in well-designed research is invaluable to the development and refinement of effective

mitigation strategies, “especially when policymakers refuse to reach informed decisions on their own” (Reece). “But this isn’t just an Indigenous issue,” Reece says, “water pollution does not stop at our doors. It will affect everyone in Canada and the world because we are all made of water.” Reece ends her interview by asking Canadians “to decolonize our relationships and the systems that we live.” She believes that artists and writers have an important role in destabilizing our cultural politics and power relations that empower some and disempower others: “Louis Riel, our Métis leader who was hanged, said that ‘our people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back’” (Reece).

Canadian/Indigenous artists (writers, filmmakers, illustrators, photographers) highlight the intertwined resilience of their human and nonhuman communities. Kelton Stepanowich's short film *God's Acre* (2016), for example, portrays an old Indigenous man refusing to leave his home behind as the land disappears under rising waters. Stepanowich is a Metis director from the Dene community of Janvier, south of Fort McMurray. With a group of filmmakers, they shot *God's Acre* on the Mikisew Cree First Nation at the Allison Bay reserve, about 15 minutes outside Fort Chipewyan. In an interview with Edmonton Journal, Stepanowich explains how "tons of reserves have had major flooding issues in the last few years" (qtd. in Griwkowsky). Yet, their film does not provide a simple reason behind the rising waters. For instance, the leaking of tailings materials into the groundwater and its direct impact on waterways, snowpack, spring run-off, and water levels (high in areas that are usually low and low in places that are generally high) resulting in both floods and droughts. Also, hydroelectric dams bring a new risk of flooding due to the large quantities of water stored in the dams. Instead, through the medium of the film—close-ups and jump cuts—Stepanowich captures the tensions of the toxic sublime (the dissonant feeling of power and powerlessness, beauty and ugliness) that constitute the lives

of Indigenous peoples in Canada: "it's about a character dealing with something larger than him" (qtd. in Griwkowsky). The film is "a culmination of the contradictions, confusions, injustices, and ironies of [I]ndigenous-settler relations" animated by the rising waters (Chen et al. 228).

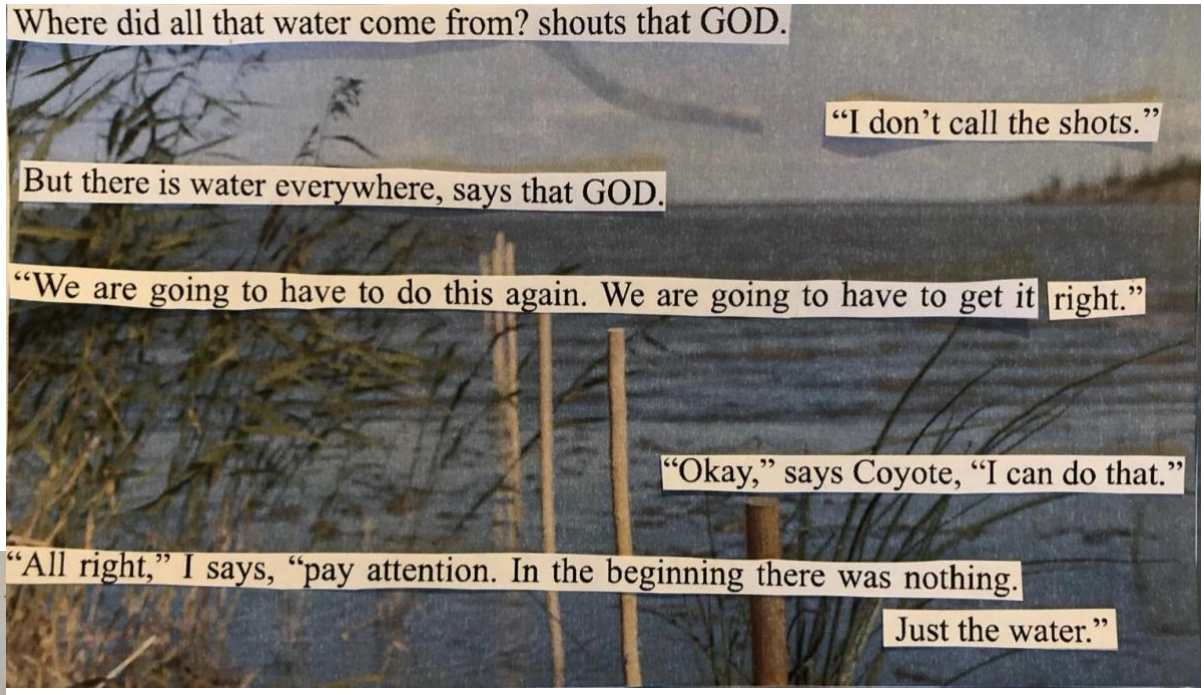
I choose Stepanowich's film for my found poem "Within Watery Contexts" (see Poem 4.5) since the film does not show/explain the cause of the rising waters. Rather it shows us the consequences of colonial control over waters, lands, and peoples in the name of human progress (the consequences of the "improving eye"). Thus, for this poem, I try to highlight the Athabasca River's power to flow beyond its banks and defy the colonial logic of the oil sands operations trying to maintain/control it. Since the film has very little dialogue, the presence of the water (as a character) guides the viewer through the liminality of the unknown spaces in the film. Water erodes, lubricates, and bursts through the rigidity of settler-colonial practices that "can never fully be aware of or control all our causes and consequences" (Chen et al. 229). In the film, water embodies the power of our kin-centric relations and possibility, a power emblematized by the sublime rising of the waters.

While watching the film, I asked myself how I can reorient my position so that I am not simply witnessing the destruction of an Indigenous man's home; rather, I am an active participant in the before and the after of the film's narrative, which constitutes the current ecological destruction of the Athabasca River. How can I approach the film with a response-ability and possibility to cross the imaginative borders and lines that limit my ability to "inherit the layers upon layers of living and dying that infuse every place?" (Haraway 138). Through the relation between *God's Acre*, Reece's interview responses, Cort Gallup's interview in the documentary *Overburden* (directed and produced by Warren Cariou and Neil McArthur) and Canadian/

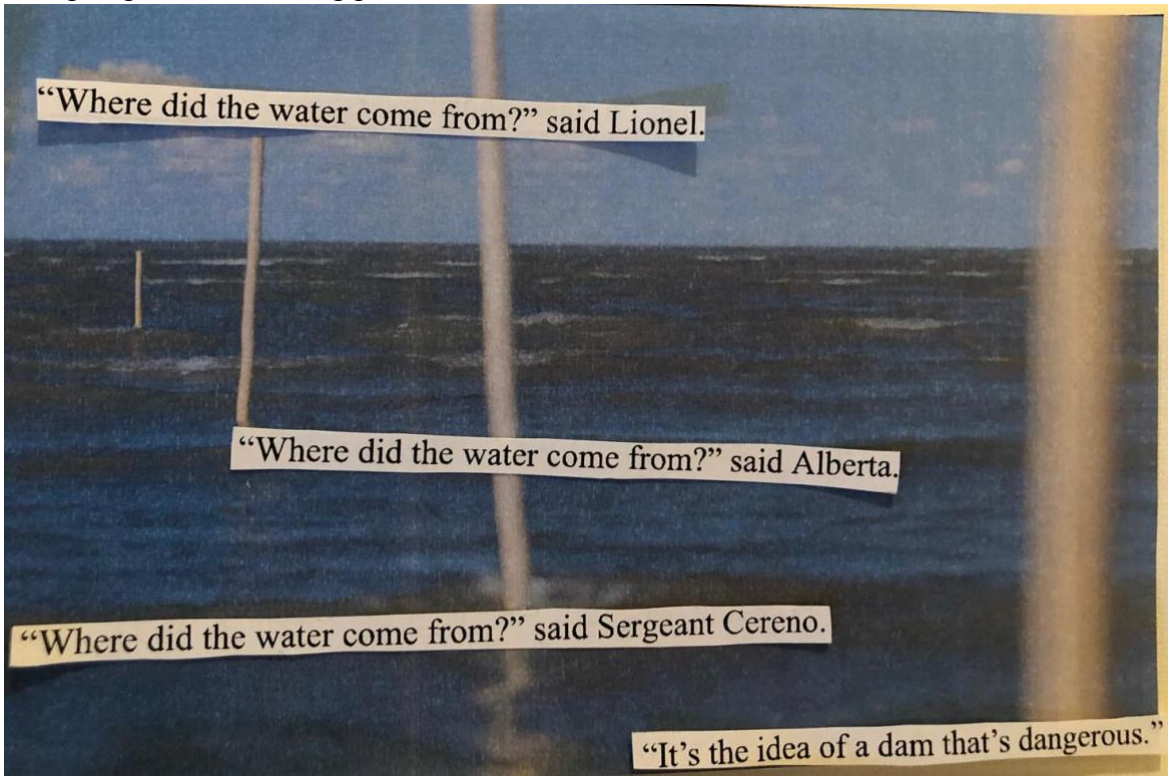
Cherokee author Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), I bring artists, activists, readers, and nature (specifically the presence of water), into ecological dialogue.

My found poem questions the "improving eye" of settler-colonial culture that determines who is visible/invisible and who is in place/out of place without assuming knowledge of the Indigenous communities affected by the oil sands operations in Alberta. Hence, I use King's novel, "based on a composite of [I]ndigenous experiences and hydroelectric construction in Canada" (Chen et al. 227), to annotate *God's Acre* by layering quotes from the story with scenes from the film. With quotes from King's fictional novel to annotate the film, my goal is to show the power and danger of not just the physical dam but also the idea of damming water. For example, the tailings ponds where they store residue bitumen water and other toxins are created like dams. If broken, the water flowing out will destroy everything in its path, both directly and indirectly through its toxicity. I also want to show that even without the threat of these dams breaking, the toxins in these ponds are already leaching into the groundwater and exist in the fish, water, and animals that Indigenous peoples eat. Thus, the dam from King's novel also works metaphorically to show how the toxins in the Athabasca River flow into beings and their cells. Each cell in the body is then like a dam storing tailings and toxins with the potential to spread, destroy, and conquer the body.

With King's novel, I both highlight the fictional nature and the false promise of settler-colonial "development" as well as the material possibility of humans surviving the tensions of the toxic sublime through "a revolutionary patience and compassion for ourselves as watery bodies" (Chen et al. 229). I consequently create an in-between space—through the interview dialogues with Indigenous peoples—to meet the reader and coexist together beyond the strictures of the "improving eye" that sees time as linear, nature as passive, and modernity as progress.



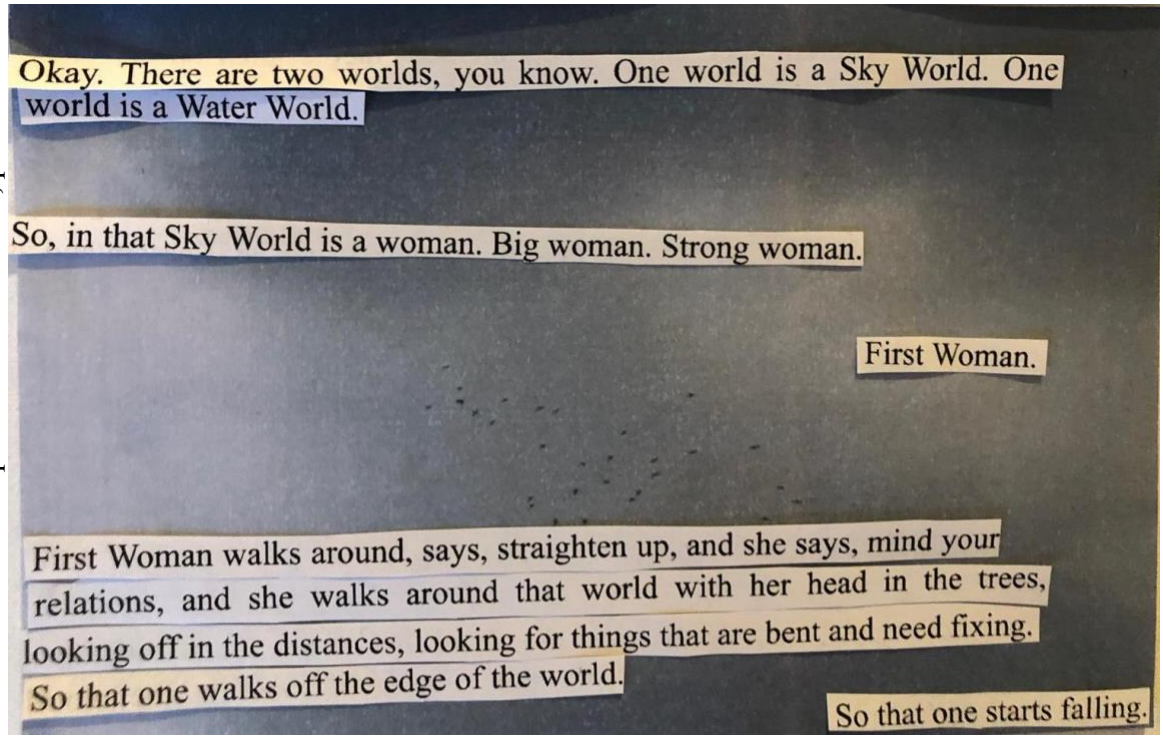
"After they use the water to remove the bitumen from the soil, they take whatever is leftover and pump it into these big ponds because there is still oil in that water. In the creation of

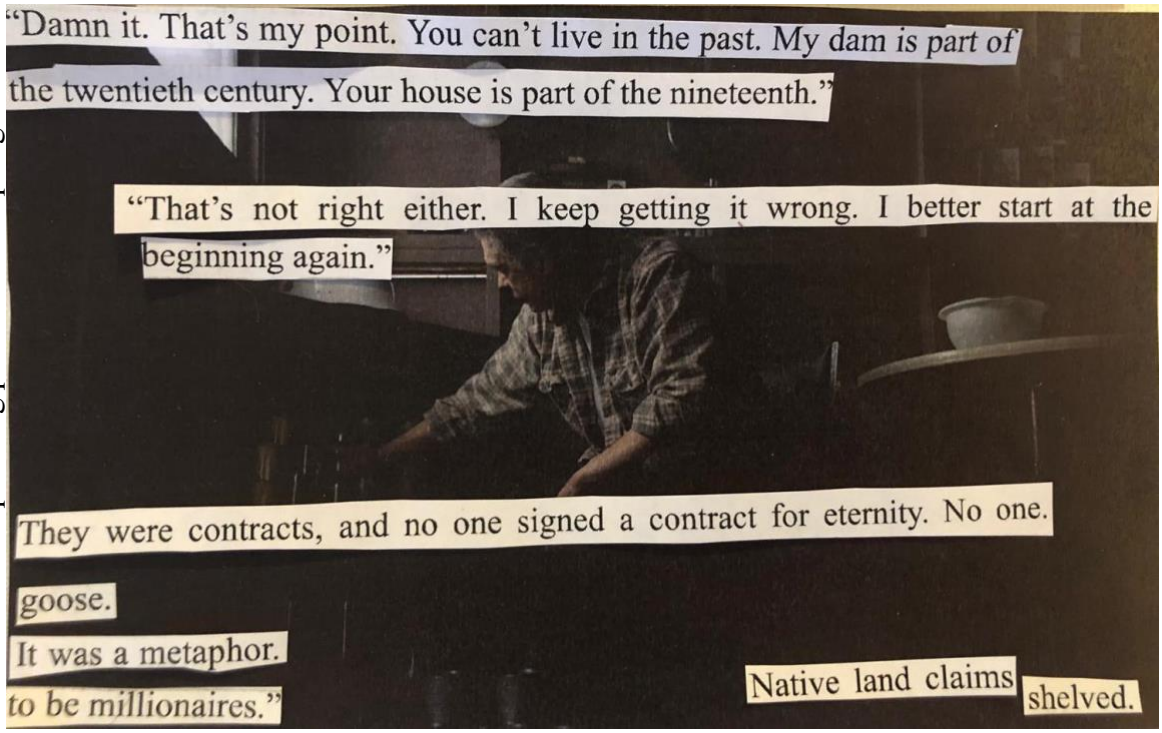


these ponds, they have built gigantic walls and dams. They say if one of those dams breaks, we'd have ten minutes to get out of here. I don't know where we'd go"–Cort Gallup, Office Manager at

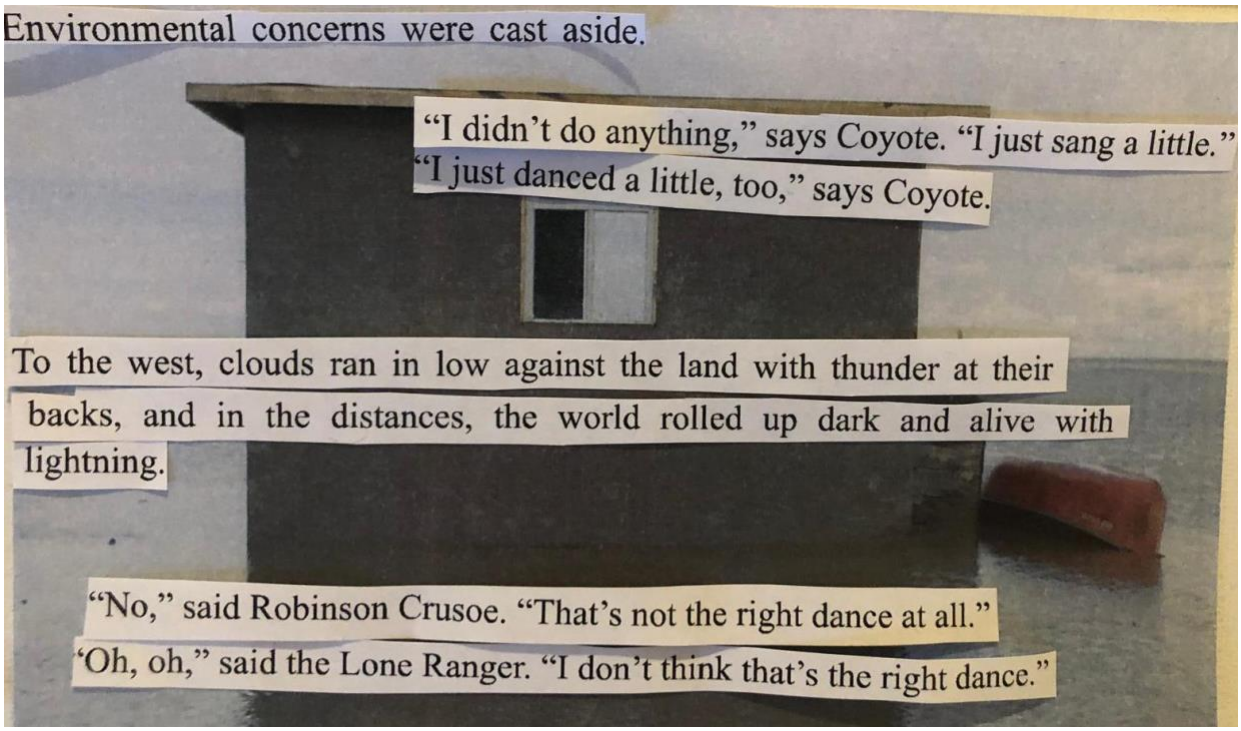
Fort Mckay Métis Nation. "'wahkohtowin,' which means all things are interconnected, and this underlies everything that we do" – Cleo Reece, Environmental Activist from Fort McMurray

"Toxins leak into the River, wetlands, and local waterbodies from the tailings ponds, especially during the fish spawning periods in the spring snowmelt"–Helene Walsh for Keepers of the Athabasca, p. 20.

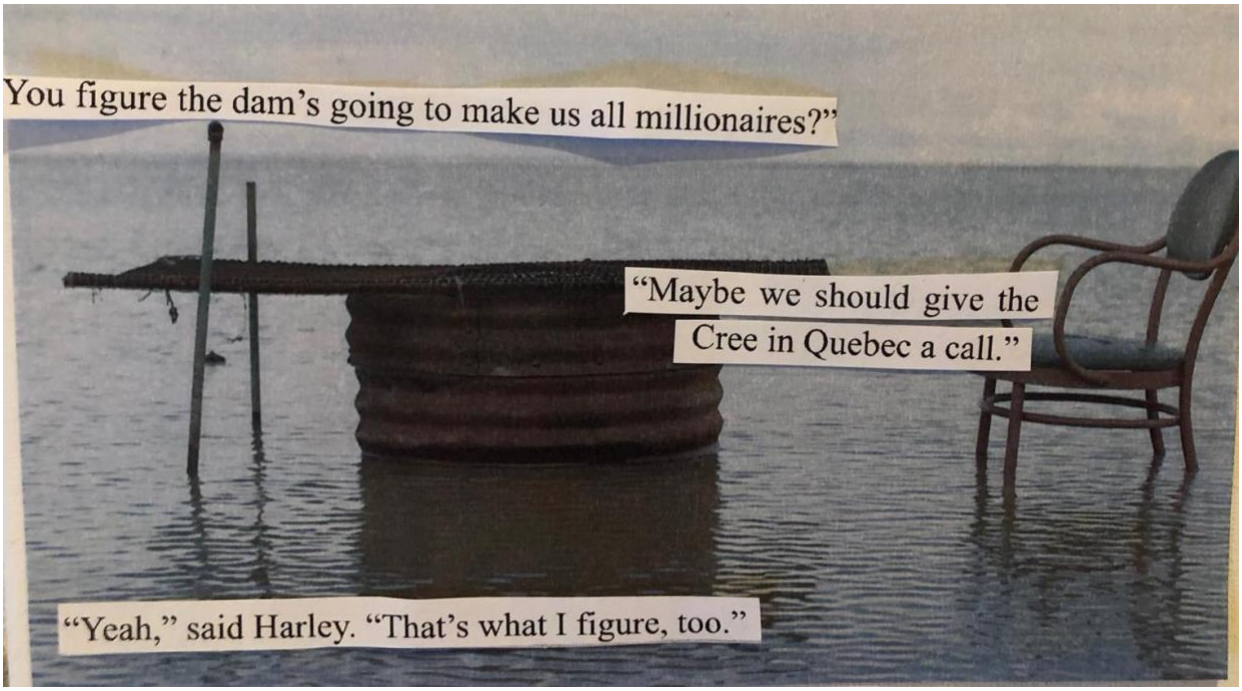




First Nation. "But this isn't just an Indigenous issue. Water pollution does not stop at our doors.

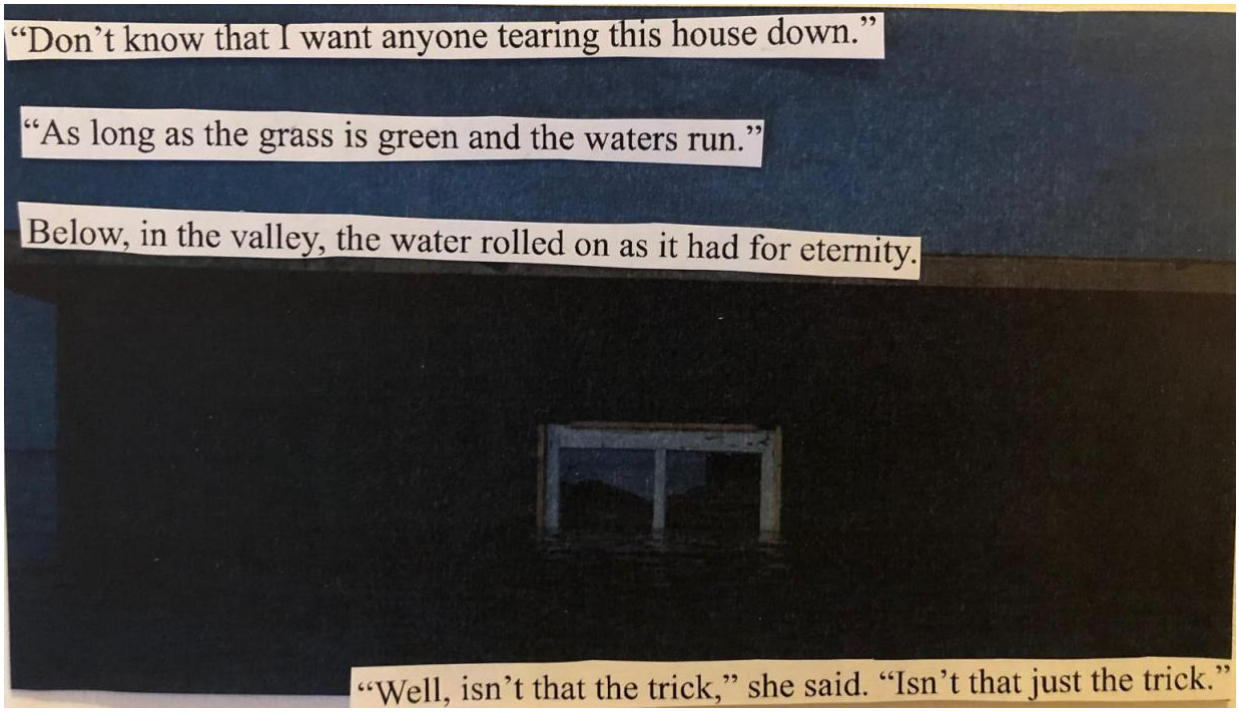


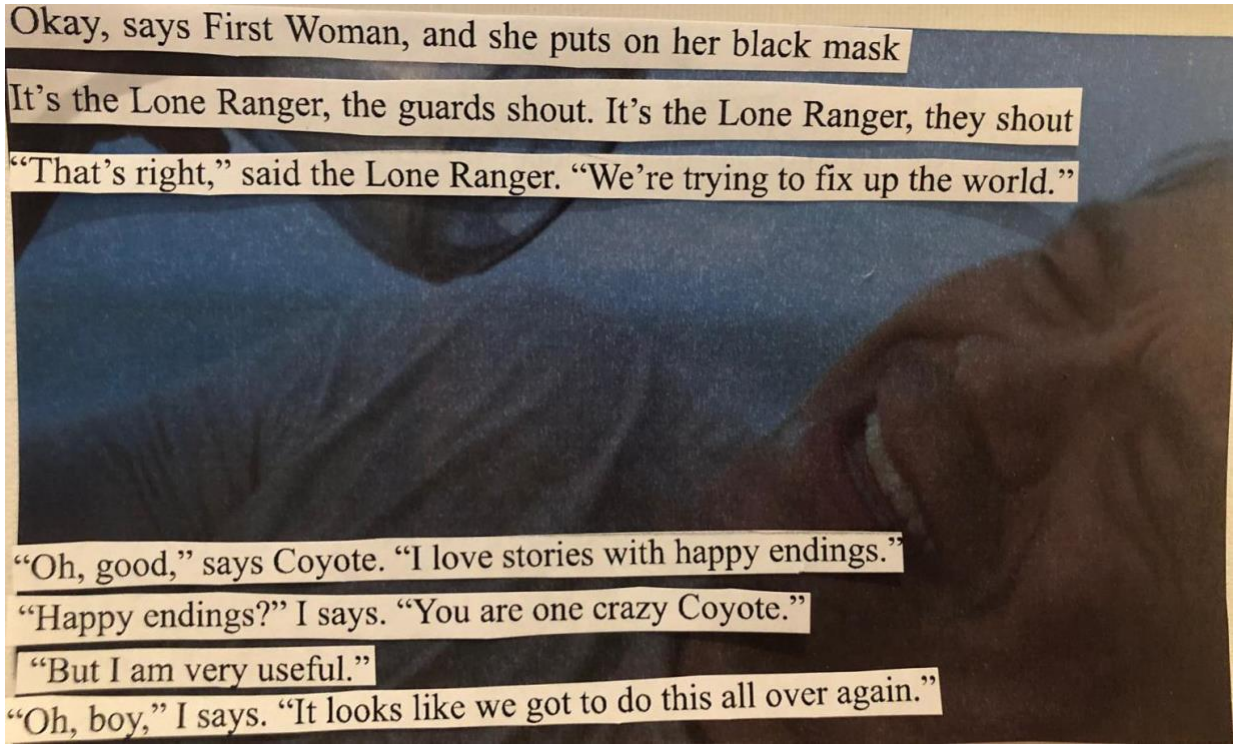
It will affect everyone in Canada and the world because we are all made of water"– Cleo Reece.



"Elders from Fort McKay noticed the water tasting oily, sour, and salty, and leaving behind a brown residue when boiled . . . We need all beings to help sustain our biodiversity"– Cleo Reece.

"Louis Riel, our Métis leader who was hanged, said that 'our people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back'" – Cleo Reece.





"In the last 50 years, they made it so you can't drink water, you can't eat the animals… If they keep doing that for the other 50 years, I don't know how people are going to survive"– qtd. in Keepers of the Athabasca, "Interviews with Traditional Knowledge Holders" 35.

Poem 4.5 "Within Watery Contexts"

King's novel has multiple stories playing alongside each other; creation stories are intertwined with mythical and realistic timelines of the narrative. While the main story is about a fictional Blackfoot community in Southern Alberta and the construction of the "Grand Baleen Dam," which "has fundamentally disrupted local ecology and further circumscribed traditional Blackfoot lifeways" (Chen et al. 227), King also uses historical and mythical characters such as Sky/First Woman and Coyote (a trickster) to generate change and continuity within the novel. First Woman in the novel sets the standard for storytelling—how to tell the story right—while one of Coyote's roles as a trickster, King explains in an interview, "is to try to set the world right" (qtd. in Rooke 68). In the novel, Coyote takes on the role of the listener as both the narrator (portrayed as "I says") and First Woman (embodying more than one character: Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robin Crusoe, and Hawkeye) guide Coyote through multiple stories. As Coyote listens to the stories, Coyote breaks the rules and crosses boundaries to fix things in the novel. Through Coyote's role as listener, the reader is also interpolated into the story as a participant. Thus, in my found poem, I use Coyote's role as a trickster to reposition the viewer/poet from a passive participant in the poem to an active listener/trickster negotiating their differences in order to make things happen ("to set the world right") by floating across time, in and out of the poem, to affect and be responsible for the future of the Athabasca River.

My found poem "Within Watery Contexts" redistributes feelings of anxiety, ambivalence, and disenchantment associated with ecological destruction to subvert the dualism between the self and "the Other." This dualism inhibits our ability (as humans) to understand our social/political differences and our ecological points of convergence: why "[our] garbage [is] someone else's cancer" (Wong 47); why some being's ecological distress is our concern. Working with the medium of the film—close-ups and jump cuts—I accent the thresholds and

liminal sites of human and nonhuman coexistence (uncontrolled waters, tailings ponds, dams) to portray how beings can survive and heal within nature's liminal places and thresholds. For example, the film emphasizes the uncanny feeling of the rising waters through a jump cut from a medium shot of the sticks to a close-up view of the sticks deep into the water. I also bring forth the feelings of anxiety and confusion in my poem by using these shots from the film and accenting the scale of the rising waters through the repetition of the phrase "Where did the water come from?" (King 84). The poem begins when the GOD (who is Coyote's dream that gets loose in King's novel) shouts "Where did all that water come from?" (32). The GOD here ironically personifies fear, uncertainty, doubt, and impotence toward this dilemma of the rising waters. When GOD asks again about the mystery water, the narrator ("I says") interrupts GOD, stating "We are going to have to do this again . . . to get it right," and Coyote replies "Okay . . . I can do that" (86). Thus, my poem portrays that while GOD (the "improving eye" of (wo)man)) is trying to master the "natural" in fear of living in the shadow of its "repressed violences" (Chen et al. 224), the narrator and Coyote are working to understand the story/situation because mistakes happen when someone is not "pay[ing] attention" (King 86).

I suggest through my poem that for the poet/reader to survive and heal with Athabasca's polluted waters, they need to pay attention to how we are all connected to the River and each other, which requires both the poet and reader to become active participants in the poem. The reader is implicated in the poem by reading the conversations between Coyote and the narrator. From the beginning of the poem to the end, Coyote is being taught how storytelling can change and "fix up the world" (King 105). The reader is also learning about storytelling by Coyote's example, since, as Anishnabe writer and critic Gerald Vizenor states, "listeners and readers become the trickster," creating symbolic and literal meanings in stories/poems (189). Thus, it is

important how the reader reads and interprets the poem—the images, the quotes on top of the images and between the images—because similar to Coyote's thoughts and actions, or "tricks," that can create change in the story, reckless reading can also create havoc on a story. These "tricks" or how we read, interpret, and view stories/poems are not necessarily bad or good. It is how we learn to accept our role as active participants in shaping human and nonhuman relations that matters. The poem portrays the importance of human and nonhuman coexistence by juxtaposing the Creation story of Sky/First Woman to the development of the dam in the narrative. When a colonial voice in the poem states that the dam is part of the twentieth century and the Indigenous person's house is part of the nineteenth (King 122), the poem responds with a reflective tone: "That's not right either. I keep getting it wrong. I better start at the beginning again" (81). Thus, I (the poet) meet with the reader to start over again and read the poem from a different position, one that sees Indigenous knowledges as integral to human and nonhuman survival. By "start[ing] at the beginning again," the poet repositions the reader to connect with the water, find a sense of continuity and coherence to what seem as separate events: the flooding in the images, the breaking of the dam in the narrative, and the polluting of the Athabasca River by the oil sands operations.

The poet and the reader also meet each other in between the spaces of the images to understand how "all things are interconnected" (Reece). For example, the narrator states in the poem, "[i]t's the idea of a dam that's dangerous" (King 223), and underneath the image is a quote by the Office Manager at Fort Mckay Métis Nation, Cort Gallup, explaining that if one of the dams from the tailings ponds (where they store residue bitumen water and other toxins) breaks, the community has only ten minutes to relocate (*Overburden* 09:36–10:32). Thus, the idea that humans can control the "natural world," or influence how it conforms to the "dictates of colonial

progress" (Chen et al. 221), is what haunts the possibility of human and nonhuman coexistence—what constitutes the "improving eye." This idea ("improving eye") then connects the oil sands operations to the breaking of the dam and the flooding/rising waters since the oil sands change the River's topography, affecting the flow of water inside and outside of the River.

I emphasize the haunting quality of the "improving eye" that controls how we see/read the world by portraying the poem as a series of old photographs with printed words on top of printed images. To figure out how the story/poem is put together, the reader has to mine the works as one would a cluster of artifacts to understand how they all intersect through their unique differences. For example, in the poem, Coyote causes a storm, creating clouds, thunder, and lightning by "sing[ing] a little" and "danc[ing] a little, too" (King 350). Two of First Woman's personas reply, "That's not the right dance at all" (235). Through Coyote's singing and dancing, the reader learns that actions have consequences, and the wrong action (the wrong dance or song) can cause a storm or break a dam. These actions can haunt a person's life and their relations with other beings. Hence, making the wrong ecological choices can affect everyone since "pollution does not stop at [the one] door[]" (Reece). The reader learns to be responsible for their input/interpretation and choices in the poem and outside. For instance, one of the pictures from the poem shows an empty chair and fire pit submerged in water, and an Indigenous person asking if the "dam's going to make [them] all millionaires," which to that someone replies, "Maybe we should give the Cree in Quebec a call" (King 321). The haunting photograph of the empty chair with the rising waters and the conversation between the two Indigenous peoples portray why modernity/settler-colonialism is a dangerous scam for Indigenous peoples. Hence, the reader is positioned in the poem to read/interpret the haunting

photographs and the discussions carefully, in the context of the high human and nonhuman cost of colonial progress and modernity.

Both the poet and the reader are positioned "to fix up the world," or more specifically, to save the Athabasca River from further destruction, by learning how to resist settler-colonial practices through "a vision that is neither atavistic nor apocalyptic nor techno-utopian, but which hints at a healthier approach to causality" (Chen et al. 229). When in 1899, the Dene and Cree of the Athabasca region signed Treaty 8, they thought they were sharing the land between two peoples and protecting their own "rights of livelihood and use of the land extending, as their oral history of the treaty would put it, 'as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the waters flow" (Turner 92-93). Not only were Indigenous rights not protected, but the land turned out to be the world's largest deposits of crude oil, which settlers have subsequently exploited in one of the most ecologically damaging extraction projects on Earth. However, King's novel and my poem portray that "as long as the grass is green and the waters run," human and nonhuman coexistence "are threatened by, but also perhaps threatening to, the continuing penetration of the commodity form" (Chen et al. 50). To resist the violent colonial practices of destruction then requires negotiation with our nonhuman environments, with the waters, the birds, the fish, and the land, to learn from them how we can survive under the most stressful conditions.

The poem's conclusion does not offer easy answers on how to solve or fix the world, or more specifically, Athabasca's polluted waters. Instead, it shows why the reader has to be an active participant in the world to make things happen for human and nonhuman coexistence. Coexistence requires much patience and compassion, as portrayed by the narrator realizing they have to repeat the story in the last shot of the poem when Coyote thinks this shot is a happy ending: "I love stories with happy endings" (King 196). Ultimately, King's *Green Grass,*

Running Water, and the interview responses from Indigenous peoples living with the oil sands operations in Alberta, interpret/annotate the images of the poem so that we (the reader and the poet) are not simply witnessing the survival of an Indigenous man as his home is drowned underwater; we are also interpolated into the world of the poem to understand how water binds together the "separate incidents of life" (Chen et al. 47) in Alberta, Canada: the rising waters in the film; the breaking of the dam in the story; the extraction of bitumen in Northern Alberta; and the cancers of Indigenous peoples downstream.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

Extractive and polluting industries in Canada, such as the landfill site in Nova Scotia, the steel factories in Hamilton, and the oil sands operations in Alberta, do violence to "othered" communities (IBPOC peoples and nonhuman nature), treating their homes as sacrifice zones, dumping toxic waste on/in their environments and extracting their lands and waters for resources. The "improving eye" of the European explorer/colonizer/capitalist determines who/what is overburden or unproductive waste; hence, Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour in Canada become the "waste" whose rights to clean water and environments must be cleared out of the way for (settler-)colonial progress.

There are many cases of environmental racism in Canada/America that were not mentioned and examined due to the limit of this thesis. For example, in 1959, General Motors and Reynolds Metals dumped high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), mercury, "and other toxic wastes such as solvents, degreasers, trichloroethylene and formaldehyde" in the Mohawk Nation (an Iroquoian-speaking Indigenous people of North America) at Akwesasne (in Ontario) and the territories of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe (in New York) (Grinde et al. 181). It took General Motors two decades of downplaying the severity of the problem before finally disclosing in a report in 1984 the various toxins they had dumped on the land and in the lagoons surrounding both Akwesasne and the Saint Lawrence River (181). Due to the high degree of toxicity, infants at Akwesasne were being born "with cleft palates, deafness and intestinal abnormalities" (189). A Mohawk mother at Akwesasne, Sherry Skidders, cried as she described her experience with the high levels of PCBs in their waters and land:"'[n]ow you have to wonder every time you take a breath,'" she said (189) when discovering that her breast milk was laced with PCBs; the horrific reality was that "[s]he had been poisoning her own children" (qtd. in

Grinde et al. 189). Despite endeavours to clean up industrial practices and polluted sites, the "improving eye" of governments and industries creates an endless cycle of abuse, expropriation, and neglect as they continue exerting their power over IBPOC peoples' land and water for their resources. Faced with this reality, my research-creation foregrounds IBPOC peoples' micro-interventions, responsiveness, and cultivating ways of living with an always changing Earth, despite (settler-)colonial assumptions that IBPOC lands are "wastelands" awaiting improvement or dumping grounds for colonial development.

As ecological crises intensify, ecocritics (poets, scholars, writers, artists) find diverse ecologically-informed modes of relating to nonhuman nature, such as the use of found texts. For instance, Canadian ecopoets Stephen Collis and Jordan Scott, in their book *Decomp*, engage with the interactions between the human and nonhuman through the medium of words and matter—the decomposition of manufactured paper (and human words) by nature's organisms. For a year, Collis and Scott left copies of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in five distinct locations in British Columbia. Darwin's book introduces the scientific theory that through natural selection, species evolve throughout generations. Just as evolution rewrites the DNA codes of life, Collis and Scott found that nature has rewritten Darwin in different ways based on the very different biogeoclimatic zones that had "read" his book (4). Through the process of decomposition, the pages from the books, and each sentence, word, letter, fall into comminuted fragments, and the text becomes part of nature (a way of giving life to words). Reading then becomes an act of decomposition, comminution. Thus, *Decomp* redefines our understanding of reading who or what a "somebody" is. We attempt to translate the fragments we find in the book ("the foreign bodies") like Darwin finding himself in a condition of translation with respect to the species he encountered, but without "bearing the miraculous stamp of meaning" as "writing

rots" and "meaning flees," with each broken word and shifted letter (5). Informed by such practices, though working in different ways and to different ends, my creative techniques (to redact, erase, layer found words) are specific to particular human relations (colonial texts versus IBPOC voices), and this specificity produces different "readings" of place/home and our human/nonhuman relations. I am then, in some ways, pairing (found) poetry with de/composition—composing and decomposing the waste (industrial waste, garbage and human waste) that constitutes the sacrifice zones of colonial environmental violence and injustice, and the words that create, resist, and stay with them.

My formal techniques of working with found text appropriate the practices of extraction and overburden such as cutting up, redacting, layering, erasing, and drawing on materials, to remove the readily visible, dominant ideologies of white supremacy and colonialism, and furthermore, for resisting transcendental fantasies about a utopian world without colonial abuse, neglect, and selfishness. With (found) poetry, words, as explained by Daniel Coleman in *Yardwork*, "shape-shift each time we dig them out" (39); thus, words never mean the same thing. In this thesis, I have de/composed colonial words to "reanimate" the way I imagine place (Coleman 240). I reposition myself to stay with the ecological/social problems of the colonial texts by "mak[ing] sure that [my] digging and clipping [of words] is about care and sharing … rather than pillaging and hoarding [distinguishing between what is/is not overburden/valuable], which makes for collective suicide" (236).

Staying with the idea of decomposition and planting poetry, Canadian geo/eco poet Chris Turnbull has curated an ongoing, site-specific footpress, *rout/e*, whereby poems are planted on trails all over Canada. Between 2011 till 2015, Turnbull planted a diverse bunch of poems by several Canadian poets. Throughout the year, the poems have transformed, ranging from erasure

(a sunspot from the sun burning a hole in the paper), holes/markings (from animal tooth marks), and the relocation of poems by people. Thus, the poems change over time as the materials become weathered from the mud splatter, rain, snow, and sun. The beings who encounter the poems the most are those who routinely use the trails/environments—the bugs, pollen, bikers, and hikers. With this project, Turnbull highlights the possibility of encountering a poem in places where written poems are not usually found. What does it mean to find and examine a poem and perhaps never read the poem? Like the environments hosting the poem, Turnbull portrays how a poem is never fully done; it is always a work in progress. Although my poems engage less materially with the land itself, my found poems are also a product of the environments they engage with, which means they can be messy, incoherent, open, and unfinished.

My poetry and poetic techniques are also deeply inspired by Rita Wong's poetics. Rita Wong's *undercurrent*, for example, uses found sources (quotes from authors, poets, scholars, locals, and those who think with water) and prints them like waves that occupy the bottom of the pages. These quotes (found sources) work like "undercurrents:" as the water underneath the poems quietly persisting under Wong's breaking and weaving of water issues and water sovereignty, also working as a form of annotation for her poems, like a conversation with others who seek dialogue with water. Her creative techniques in *undercurrent* are similar to the ones in *forage* where she uses quotes to border or juxtapose her poems, and in *Beholden: A Poem as Long as the River*, where Wong's and Fred Wah's poems are in conversation with each other and in relation/dialogue with a long map of the Columbia River. Thus, her techniques foreground poetry as a conversation in movement (like the River), subverting the idea that poetry centers on an "I" or one author/speaker. Like Wong's, my poems in this thesis pay close attention to how my poetic voice is in conversation with IBPOC voices/works. Throughout this writing journey

and creating for "Where Water Hits Home," I wondered if we (ecopoets/critics) can redefine poetry as becoming part of the water? The River comprises thousands of water molecules; my poetry is just one of these molecules moving toward and building upon the many other poetic creations that constitute this River of ecocritical thought and expression. I also thought: what if I remove my writing from the poems I (re)create? There are poems in this thesis where I haven't written a single word and instead let the IBPOC voices/works cultivate our wonder and respect for staying with a damaged Earth exploited by dominant colonial systems. However, this does not mean that I am not in conversation with these voices as they become part of my poems. I exist with the poems as I frame and elicit anxiety in the presence of the toxic sublime.

My research-creation involves the conscious use of strategies (through found poetics) to reposition the colonizer and the colonized toward a decolonial ecopoetics. Decolonial ecopoetics is intimately related to being responsible for a changing world while resisting and challenging the violence of extracting and polluting technologies on IBPOC peoples and natures. The difference between the "improving eye" and poiesis/sympoesis lies then in their position with the world: the "improving eye" positions (wo)man to exploit and exhaust the world, whereas poetry unearths a responsibility for the world, the dark ecology that we must face. In this project, the ecopoet's work is to bring human relations into ecological dialogue, with their distinct narratives of existing, resisting, and surviving in the Chthulucene. "Where Water Hits Home" advocates for an ethics of care, of seeing and being present and conscious in the Anthropocene/Chthulucene through a "radical commitment" to the world as we "stay with the trouble" of all its meaninglessness and our difficult/beautiful relationships with human and nonhuman nature.

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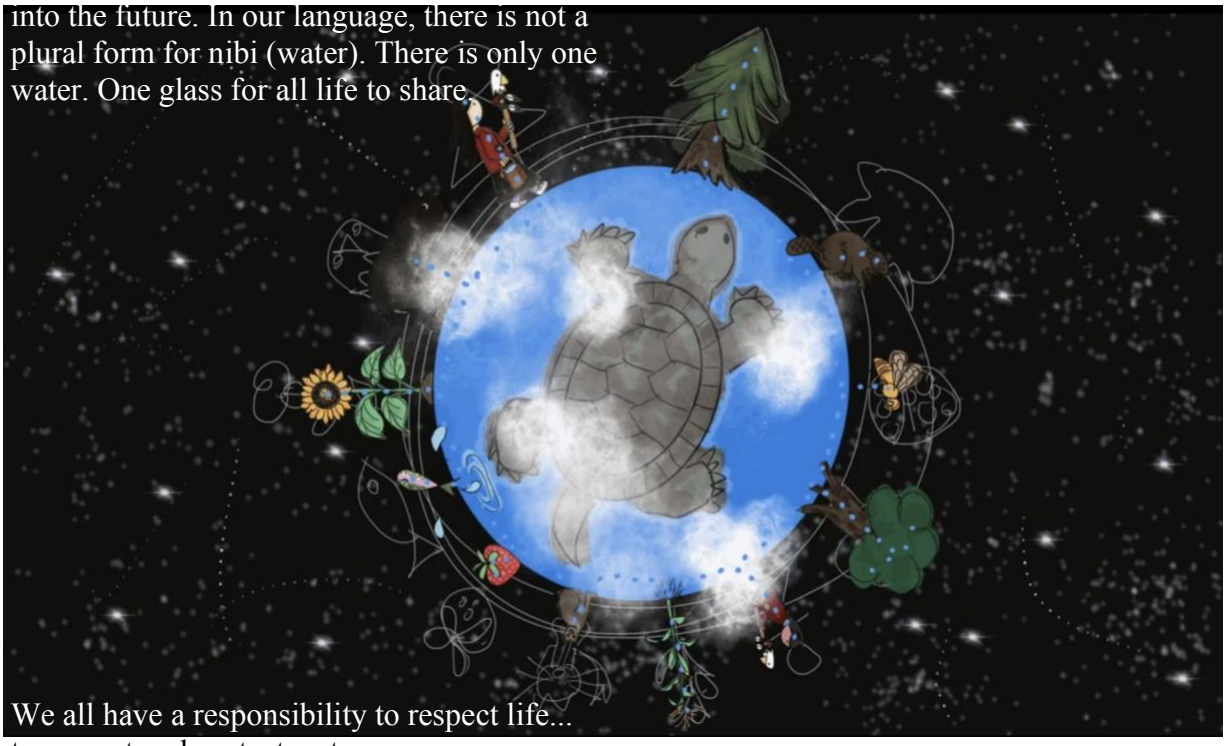
Appendix 1 -

A Revolution

I like to share this illustration I drew…blue water drops moving around Turtle Island, in and out of life, being shared by everyone. We are all connected by water…We drink water, excrete water; we're all born of water. That water goes back to the earth and is taken up by trees, bears, berries. The water the dinosaurs drank is in your body today. The water in your body today is the water your great great grandchildren will swim in. We are all responsible for the health of the water. Taking care of water shows respect for each other and all life on the earth…for now and into the future. In our language, there is not a plural form for nibi (water). There is only one water. One glass for all life to share.



We all have a responsibility to respect life...
to respect and protect water.

Writing *The Water Walker* and *Nibi is Water* is part of my water work - Joanne Robertson.

begins with a burst
from a fire hydrant
unruled water blurring lines
on a map, you are in place
here, you are refusal to be confined
through the pipes
resistance drinks the lichen, moss, and fungi
from this water and land, you see
like sunlight the underground
aquifers, wetlands, sewage, ocean currents, and the blood inside you
come of moving mountains
both gradually and through earthquakes
this kin-centric uprising.

Joanne Robertson is an Ojibwe Anishinaabe Water Walker and the writer/illustrator of *The Water Walker*. Robertson walked around the Great Lakes with Grandmother Josephine-ba Mandamin, the lead walker for Mother Earth Water Walkers.